

jubilat



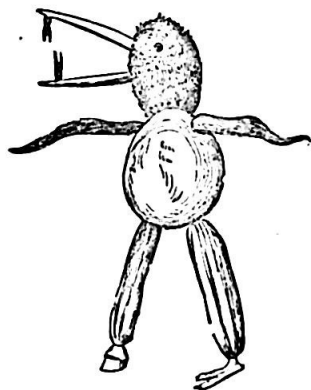
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jubilat

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FOR THE ARTS**

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THE NEWS

Arda Collins

At last, terror has arrived.

Next door, the house has gone up in flames.

A woman runs from the burning wreck, her face smeared
with blood and ashes. She screams that her children are kidnapped.

It's truly exciting, and what more would anyone ask?

For a rare and beautiful egg to present itself in the grass?

For sex with the liquor store owner to progress into something
meaningful?

You don't know what I've done in front of the mirror.

I've pulled my shorts up high like a thong. I've walked back and forth
doing little kicks and making faces. I've stopped, I've stared.

I try to get my mind around the sight of myself. I make a face.

Of great seriousness. I imagine that I've just received
a large and upsetting piece of news. Then I look into my eyes.

Can I guess what I am thinking? Can I tell you what it is?

HEAVEN

It was finished and went to heaven.
Heaven is a white Formica table.
Not what I expected,
but I'm not unsatisfied.
God still isn't here.
I'm not even waiting.
Where would I be
trying to get to? It's like I'm a person
without face parts.
I remember what it was like
to use my eyes,
and the things I looked at.
I think a lot of seeing the world from a car,
being with the air over fields,
stable and light brown when it's gray out,
or invisible at night,
like they could be water
if you didn't know where you were;
and the different temperatures
from the window, and wearing clothes;
all converged in my irises
like something rising
but not moving,
that made the rest of me aware.
This is something like that,
except the rest of me isn't really part of it.
I put my hands on the table
and spread them, like
"here's all ten." There's nothing on it,
on the table,

so I found that out.
What did you do today?
I ask god.
God doesn't say anything.
I don't say anything else.
Not wanting to say anything,
I had that for a long time before,
and now it's here.
We stay like that
for a long time,
and I mean a really long time.
That's one thing,
god is the only one
who would do that.

DEAR RALPH LAUREN,

Robyn Schiff

Might I, if there's one in stock, be sent the
Ralph Lauren Winchester Tote
shaped like the feedbags I've seen strapped on the
fierce muzzles of the horses in pictures
children are shown to depict
for them how tasks, such as the
feeding of horses, were accomplished in
the Old West. As you
know, the weave of the wool
of the Winchester Tote

is gun-check plaid, so please don't confuse my
order with permission to
perform the background check you would need were
you selling me a gun, Ralph Lauren, or
with the booth where I would check
mine as I would, say, my
coat, entering a restaurant. I would
not relinquish it,
as some would prefer to
hold their fur in their lap

as they dine than leave it in strangers' hands
and what's more, you may not look
into my past, Ralph Lauren, and I will
not look into yours, though I note that the
plaid known as gun-check consists
of infinite weaved stairways
leading up and up and up and atop

not even one small
refined wool landing stands
a screener who would stop

either of us from climbing. Isn't this
the tartan of our clan, Ralph
Lauren? In a picture, I saw your dog,
Rugby, seated in the passenger seat
of your Jaguar and I dream
I'm holding him on my lap
as we're waived through the unmanned tollbooths of
the Jersey Turnpike.
You know the system; we
need not pay until we

exit. Do you mind if I call you Dad?
You can call me "Little Sure
Shot," as Sioux Chief Sitting Bull called Annie
Oakley when he adopted her. And there's
something else called "Annie," Dad;
a complimentary train
ticket with a hole prepunched through the list
of destinations
is named "Annie" for the
tiny holes she shot through

the decks of playing cards that Buffalo
Bill dealt one by one into
the dusty air and I wonder if the
turnpike ticket in the glove compartment's
likewise preclocked. Does it
make you sad to know Annie
Oakley was not Annie Oakley's real name?

Where do we stand when
pseudonyms take nicknames,
like my real father, for

instance, who was born Abraham and called
Dad my whole life and Hank by
my mother was named for the forefather
Abram whose name was changed by God, whose real
name may never be uttered,
as yours may not be, but how
safely written here in the ghetto of
these parentheses
(Lifshitz). (Polo by Ralph
Lifshitz). Often I wake

from this dream clutching an apocryphal
book of the Bible in which Adam
brands the animals. At home in the Ralph
Lauren Home Collection the walls of my
childhood bedroom are painted
Winchester Grey for my real
father's unloaded shotgun that stood for
him in the guestroom
closet. I'm already
riding shotgun with it

with Rugby asleep on my lap in your
silver Porsche 550
Spyder, designed by the first son of the
designer of Hitler's Volkswagen, so
you might as well adopt me.
The top's down and as the wolf

lowers into the Spyder, the Spyder
enters the vein, vain
enters glory and I
enter the country club

with you through the glory hole that is the
hidden opening which that
unseen ball the Polo Player on your
logo is always chasing always just
rolled through. Furious divots
stipple the polo grounds and
I feared the forward waving his mallet
like a tomahawk
until you told me the
logo is based on me

merely hailing a cab. Why, Dad, do you
translate me so tormented,
so raving, driving my muddy pony
with death spurs and blood on my stick. This is
a brutal way to sell shirts.
I've never seen a button-
down as beautiful as the one you lost.
I remember when
you lowered it to half-
mast on Labor Day, but

every day is Labor Day and the shop
(don't make me say your heart) is
open, open, open. The wind flogging
the white flag of your flapping shirt makes it
appear to have a man in it.

BIG COLT

Angela Ball

It took ten blacksmiths to forge
His shoes; a dozen people at a time

Could pat his forehead.
The big colt stood on the Continental Divide:

One eye saw a carnival; the other, a prison.
When the big colt neighed

There was a landslide.
His birth was difficult. Afterwards

His mother shrank to a tiny drawing
On the wall of a cave: chalk

And the blood of berries.

CROSS SECTION

Ruth Williams

A man eats blueberries then gets up to look in the bathroom mirror. He smiles, notes how his teeth look bruised.

Back in the kitchen, he tosses berries into his mouth from varying angles: close, then far, then close again. When he snaps his teeth, the berries let out a satisfying pop.

He is feeling better than he has in weeks. Finally, he is ready to leave the house. Taking the berries under one arm and folding the other like a wing behind him, he glides to the door. No time for shoes, he steps out.

On his porch, in place of his morning paper, a small bird lies stiff on its side. Its perfect heart lies beside it, lovingly presented in cross section.

Inside the heart fat ribbons of muscle intertwine with blue veins. He thinks: lace, latticework, ladder, light in the heart, light in the head, loops of light rolling into light. His blood moves in a jolt of recognition. He turns on his foot, goes inside.

But from behind the door, he still sees it: a terrible juice spreading from the heart's plum-shaped core.

DISTANT NEARNESS OR HOSTAGE BEING

Mathias Svalina

Tomorrow you will receive a shoebox
filled with human teeth. You will dig a hole
& use it as a pillow. The next day the shoebox
will be filled with photographs of teeth.
You can feed them to the tomcats
or return them to the newspaper. If you wait
one more day the teeth will become kites.
The newspapers print photographs
of their own front pages with varying captions.
The captions read: "Eight-year-old boy maimed
by landmine" & "Distant nearness or hostage being?"
Teeth grow by necessity. Front ones sharp
& grinders flat, just as a photograph has two sides
& then two more sides. The newspapers print
white boxes where photographs would have been,
but they retain the captions for the stories
& readers hold the white boxes up to their husbands,
to their employers & say "Look at what a
knife's blade we've slit along the thumb."

THE ATMOSPHERE, WHICH WAS ONCE LIKE THE INSIDE

Krista Manrique

Of an empty cardboard box, had become heavier
And heavier. Now music sounded like copper
Rain. We could not fathom lifting another bundle.

Even if it were filled with cotton, or the abandoned
Cocoons of caterpillars, we could not fathom it.
Already our spines were coiling wires. Peering

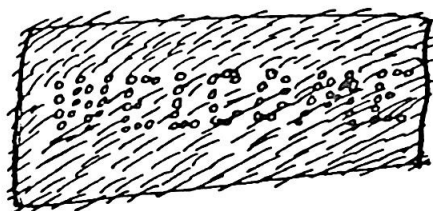
At ourselves from behind ourselves, we recognized
Our grandparents, and only the smell of inevitability,
The rust of it, defined us. We rested in quarantined

Minutes and bended our bodies backwards to straighten.
But when we paused, we noticed even our hands
Were weighted. We would have to carry our hands.

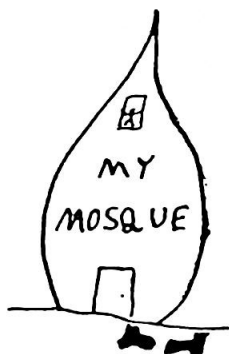
1450 - 1950

BOB BROWN

MY MOSQUE



PLEASE WIPE
YOUR MUDDY MIND
BEFORE ENTERING



AND LEAVE YOUR
THICK
CEREBRAL SHOES
OUTSIDE

I LIKE LOOKING BACK
AT THE
ILLUMINATED MSS. OF



1450

AND FORWARD
TO THE

MORE ILLUMINATING
MOVIE SCRIPTS OF

1950



I LIKE TO SEE
FLY SPECKS
ON YELLOWED PAGES
I LIKE TOO
LEAVING MY OWN ON
NEW ONES



MY FLY SPECK



EYES



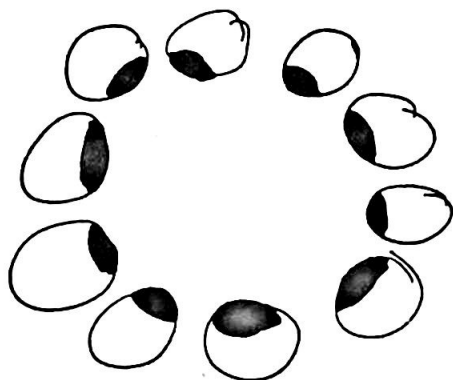
EYES



MY GODT



WHAT EYES !



EYES ON THE HALF-SHELL.

DECORATION



Stars in the Leaves



Millefleur'd tapestries



The Hundred Boys of China

"WILL YOU BE THE APE?"

Lines are simple
Plain + straightforward
Why do they always
Net + fret themselves
into Triangles



"WILL YOU BE THE APE?
OH, WILL YOU BE THE APEX
OF MY TRIANGLE?"

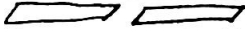
THE HES HAVE IT

HE
S HE
HER

THE TRIANGLE



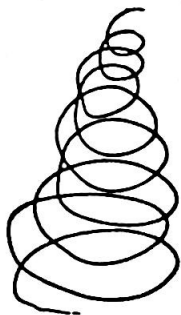
HE! HE! HE!


ROMP WITH THE
RHOMBOIDS

TAKE HOME A

 HEXAGON 

TO SURPRISE YOUR
HETAERA



GODT
GOD BLESS YOU
FOR YOUR SPIRALS

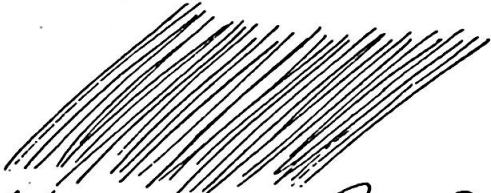


NARROW
GOLDEN LADDERS.
WOULD HAVE CARRIED
ALL THE
FOOLS
TO YOU

VIGNETTE

POETS

THEY WRITE, TOO
THE SOFT POEMS
ALWAYS ON THE BED
DIFFERENT FROM THE
WILD ONES.
WHILE STANDING
ON THE HEAD


Japanese print Rain Storm


Rice Growing in a Swamp


The Hairs on Esau's


Sanitary tooth brush

.....
And
The whiskers on a goat

HAIR-NET



WHISKERS



POMPADOURS


EYE BROWS



TAPETTES

Men and women chase
 Each other
 Day + night
 Monkeys hold
 Each other
 Externally
 By the tails

INTERLUDE

COLD HEART ♡ HOT POTATO ●
 HOT HEART ♡ COLD POTATO ○

PARIS IN PAIRS

||||| ||||| ||||| ||||| |||||

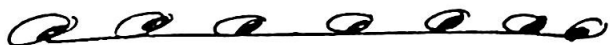
They walk the boulevards all day
 Only lying down at night

=====

THE WORLD IS MY
OYSTER



MOUNTAIN OYSTER



PRAIRIE OYSTER



OYSTER OF THE SEA

VINAGRETTE

YOU
WHO ARE REPUTED
TO MAKE
MOUNTAINS OUT OF
MOLE-HILLS
WHERE ARE YOUR MOUNTAINS?
I CAN'T SEE THEM
OVER YOUR
MOLE-HILLS

LADY FINGERS

FINGERS

MM MM

FINGER LADIES

MM MM

YOUR LOVELY

LADYLIKE

LADY FINGERS

MM

WHAT WOULD THEY BE

WITHOUT A THUMB

AND A NOSE

TO PUT IT TO



I AM WHIPPED
AROUND THE
WORLD



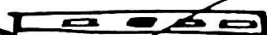
LIKE A TOP-

PARIS VOCAL

1929

Alo

Pneumatique



Allons

Henri brune blonde

Voilà

Monsieur Madame
cinq à sept

Allons

Alo

Finish.

I SPREAD WITH MY JACK KNIFE
GREAT GOBS OF
SUBTLETY ● ● ●
ON THICK SLABS OF
WHOLE WHEAT BREAD ● ● ●
AND SIT ALL DAY
ON COLD DOOR-SILLS
BEGGING FOR
HUNGRY PASSERSBY
● ● ●

HIS MUDDY SHOES
●
HER CRYSTAL MIND
●
SHE COULD NEVER
THINK PAST THEM

● BULLET ● HEAD

● - ● ●

● DUMB ● BELL

● - ● ● ● - ●

I MUST TELL YOU
DEAR
THAT YOU
THRILL ME

LIKE

LIGHTNING, *dear*

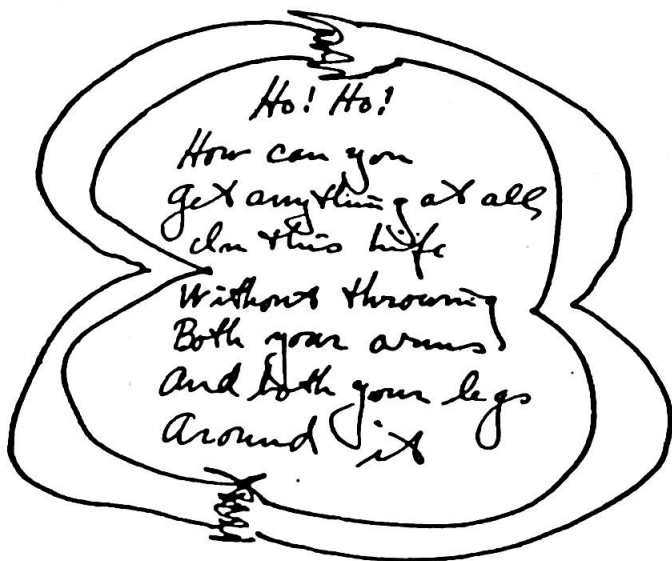
AND THAT MOST OF MY FUN
HAS BEEN IN FOLLOWING
FLASHES

WITH YOU, DEAR

YOU

Blossoms + rain
Trickles + petals
You ring in my ears

LUFF, LUFF,
THAT'S THE STUFF!



Ho! Ho!
How can you
get anything at all,
In this life
Without throwing
Both your arms
And both your legs
Around it

Keep away
you honey-bees
Keep away
you moon-struck bugs



THIS HONEYMOON IS OURS

AN INARTICULATE
UNHUNG POET
SINGS UP
BOTH SLEEVES
AT YOU

AUTOBIOGRAPHY
LIFE'S A FUNNY PLACE
TO BE

STEPHEN

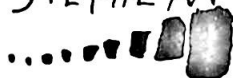


BLACK RIDERS

STEPHEN CRANE

BLACK, BLACK RIDERS

STEPHEN



AND YOU
WITH ONLY
GOLD TEETH



IN YOUR
WARBLING MOUTH

THE RACE OF ARTISTS

PAINTER, DIG YOUR FINGERS
INTO THE WHISKERS OF YOUR PARS
WRITER, CLIP YOUR WOBBLY KNEES
TOGETHER
OVER YOUR FOUNTAIN PEN SLINGS
DRIVE 'EM
PUSH 'EM
DOG 'EM
ANYTHING BUT KILL 'EM
GET UNDER THE WIRE
TO-DAY
FOR ARTS UNBEATEN ^{GLORY}

WONDER
OPENED TWO EYES
ON MY LIFE

(BIG) & (ROUND)

WONDER
WILL PUT TWO PENNIES
ON MY LIDS

(TIGHT) & (SHUT)

"AMERICA I LUFFU"
BIG NICKEL BIZ
COCA COLA
WRIGLEY
OWL CIGAR
LIFE SAVERS
GULDEN'S MUSTARD
HIRES
OH, HENRY!

WHEN TRYING TO CATCH THE
WAITER'S EYE
TO GET A
FRESH GLASS OF BEER
I OFTEN THINK OF THE
COY GLANCES
KITTENS CAST AT
MILK MEN

I have written


Ours of my heart
I have written


My heart out
It looks now as though
I wear it on my sleeve


That means nothing
It is only a saying
An expression

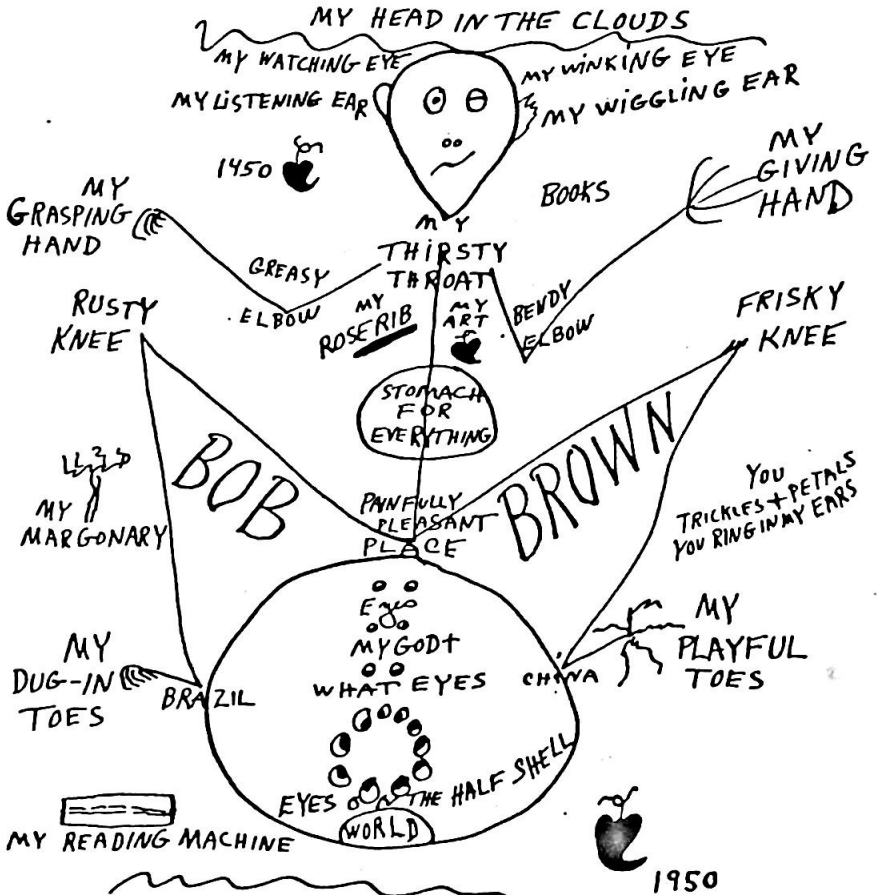
And there have been
flourishing days


When I thought
I couldn't write a
Single line

But those all out now


I have written lines + lines
and lines

I DON'T DIE!
NO FLIES ON ME!



MY SKELETON
BOTH
ARTICULATES AND GESTICULATES
THESE PONES SHALL
RISE AGAIN

SOMATIC LOSS POEM TO BIRD

Annabelle Yeeseul Yoo

The rain is nothing without you
But sad hands on ponds

And the sky is the recycled grey
Of urgency, emergency.

I am losing but looking up—
An infinity—from shore

You are the boat. From a boat
You are the shore of infinite loss.

Every waking day now smells of earthquake
Weather, and is hatefully curved.

Little miracle you don't dissolve in rain.
Your body is only, after all, fence:

Ladder. In another life, I suffered from
A kind synesthesia. I was blind

And could hear your veins
With my hands.

Your bird body was ringed
With wavelengths. I can see now.

Hurricanes will continue
Gathering their lullabies.

from HURACAN'S HARP

Stephanie Strickland

24

the future of comprehension

each ignorant of more exponentially more each day each one
ask googenie it is done
no sooner returned
says the fish retrieval piling on privation's narrowing local unimodal
niche traps

door banging at its twisted hinge

resisted global category schemes
fallout focus on the simpler for a shorter collectively
dyslexic unable (fill in the blank) K_____ I_____ D_____ to read
the writing on eroding corps of engineering levee
wall

rust filigree iron

1st order detritus objects rejects bouncing
alone in systems or as networks how my being crushed is just
avoided by your being torn apart my compression your
tension collapse 'musically' averted intertransforming islands *modulating*
bodies

I ask

my wish genie jump to questions beyond my current ken
fish I ask that you not send me home so soon
to my insatiable hovel basket buoy hold the oceans
watery ball I cling to the birdcage as it falls and fills and empties it is
an aerial

RED-LEGGED KITTIWAKE

Emily Wilson

1

Native it seems to no part
of the North American continent
but some islets off
the rugged scarps of the Aleutians
in the loose entablatured cliffs
among dwarf-willow tips.
Known if at all by its silhouette
(we can know such things by their silhouettes)
the red-legged kittiwake
glimpsed in isolate parts of Oregon
California and southern Nevada
said to go silent in winter
slitting through snow
the red-legged kittiwake.

2

The red of the red-legged kittiwake
of a kinship with orange
solders across the ice-gaps.
Native in no real part
but its obdurate course the red-
legged kittiwake goes silent.
We can know still more by the rips
through the weed.
Red-legged kittiwake
gone back in the brain toward
the noise of the narrowing ship-lanes.

3

Silver bones of the wrist
in their riggings rotate.
Pulp of the madder-root
shocked in white alum then soaked
through the wool for the waistcoat.
The frigate sprays back the gray rime
cuts through the ice-skirt
pursuing such things
to the knit of the nest.

4

Crowberry swollen with fog
lichen resist on the lowest
spokes of the spruce
red-legged kittiwake
native to no part
alone in its parts

5

The kelp closes up
where the bird has just been

6

The legs retract in the pan
of the tail near the crotch
against the streaked ruff
bits of the barbs in breakage
out in the vanes
tipped into place
leaf of the willow tipped into
its branch the tip but tip to its whole

7

So where does it go when gone.
The wake of the factory ships.
Its chevrons compound the steep bluffs
it makes itself into those ranks
like pistons or books.
Its numbers are known to be in decline.
Is red for the advent
of sex or something more plain.

8

The sea works its surface.
Notched and convex.
It gives up its force in forms it must make.
It has a grease shine.
It is where they go when gone isn't it
through the known parts

from IN THE SEA

Jimmy Lo

IN THE SEA. THERE ARE A MILLION THINGS IN
THERE (5)

Everything is in it, either "cold" or "hot." Bird necks loose and white as omens. A way of classification gets at something exterior to the object but still has ties to it like an uneven cord. Oranges imply electricity. The giant hesitant squid is "cold," horses and needles as well as most glorified bottomfeeders. I promised you a million things in there of which I will be responsible for one. Everything written and given rise to which I have known. A purse is "hot." A wallet "cold." Shrimp and lampshades, a hundred pencils shaved in one direction, waves and waves and the wind.

TINY STORIES ABOUT THE DEAD

there are many things I love about the dead one
the coins shuffle light from the riverbed into position
two tygers have joint bodies upon a high road
strewn with thin papers three times the little bells
and a stack of buns four and on their backs
and on their backs the soul is carried to a Watering Place
five in the city I love is a fire I love six
you have made of it nothing out of
nothing I stand on this gangplank and the words

[IN THIS CITY OF WORK I'M MAKING NOTHING]

Christopher Connelly

and not moving at all.

The window, window, door rattle of the street has exhausted me
and has eaten all of my grief.

I sit still and listen.

The washing and washing of passing cars
covers me like bark

and keeps me as supple as a tree
whose trunk is planted close to others,
but whose top bends gently away.

ASTRAL VERDICT

Scott Glassman

The last time I was outside myself I stopped at the patisserie on 45th and Locust. There is no patisserie there and so there is no self to step out of for that purpose, but I give myself an introduction anyway and call the person in handcuffs to the podium for the transmission:

A VERY IMPORTANT APOLOGY

STAY TUNED

As if the one outside of me who commonly breaks into fast food restaurants after dark would notice. I am sitting next to you in the audience wondering at what time the limousine will arrive. The last time I was outside myself there was no limousine or wedding march or wafting opium smoke.

OKAY, I'LL ACCEPT MY BODY

Only following a lengthy deliberation that included several exhibits of skulls and bone fragments trapped in carpet fiber. "They never had it steam-cleaned." I am not to blame because I am not a participant in the trial. Nor am I spending my lunch hour debating the issue with the jury of someone else's confidences.

INTERVIEW WITH PETER GIZZI

Peter Gizzi is the author of four books: *The Outernationale* (Wesleyan, 2007), *Some Values of Landscape and Weather* (Wesleyan, 2003), *Artificial Heart* (Burning Deck, 1998), and *Periplum* (Avec Books, 1992). His honors include the Lavan Younger Poet Award from the Academy of American Poets as well as fellowships from the Howard Foundation, the Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts, and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. He was a founding editor of *o·blék: a journal of language arts* and has also edited *The Exact Change Yearbook* and *The House That Jack Built: The Collected Lectures of Jack Spicer* (Wesleyan, 1998). Gizzi lives in Holyoke, Massachusetts, and teaches in the MFA Program for Poets and Writers at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. This interview was conducted by Robert N. Casper in New York City on May 17 and June 7, 2007.

You've said, "At best, I'm always in the process of narrating my bewilderment in the world, language, in society." Can you discuss how your poems act out of bewilderment, and the ways they act out of a sense of certainty or authority?

I guess I am suggesting here the role of not-knowing that plays itself out in the writing of poetry. That this not-knowing plays a signal role in the production of reality in a poem. I like the word *bewilderment* because it has both *be* and *wild* in it, and I can imagine also *wilderness* inside it as well. As to certainty or authority in my work, I prefer the word *inevitability*—that is to say, meaning in a poem can be at once random and inevitable, and not-knowing can come to some sort of order that allows meaning to happen, mystery. A simpler way to say this is that I write to discover what I might know only in the act of making the poem itself. Writing as an aid to discovery, and to hold always a space open, to give this openness some relief. It's a hard thing to nail down . . . so let's go back to the word *bewilderment*: at a reading someone said, "You're really a lyric poet." When

I asked her what she meant, she said, "Well, you're not a narrative poet." To which I responded by saying that I think I am a narrative poet—I'm just narrating my bewilderment as a citizen, and that spontaneous answer seemed true and has weirdly stuck with me. It feels right.

I find your poems have a signature gestural quality—certainly rhetorically, but also in terms of theme, and in the way they address the present and the past. Stylistically, they gesture toward a range of influences as well, and yet they are tonally uniform. Your last two books, Some Values of Landscape and Weather and The Outernational, seem to extend this gestural quality.

I learned I'd like both to be clear and to suggest something larger at the same time; I'd like the thought to be both more exact and yet more open in what it is trying to take on. I work with the phrase and let the music from one phrase build into the next. I feel each book extends some part of what I learn from one into another. I feel that my new book is a natural extension of my last one. Another way to think of gesture is sequencing. I am very interested in sequencing the poems in my collections, how they move from one poem into another. And then how they move from one book into another: "The De-evolution of the Father" moves nicely into "A History of the Lyric," and "Beginning with a Phrase from Simone Weil" points to "A Panic That Can Still Come Upon Me." I try to end a book with a beginning, or an opening, to the next work.

My first book, *Periplum*, and new book, *The Outernational*, are both about mapping terms—you learn from your new work about your old work, and you realize, Oh, wow, so I was thinking about this then, but now I'm somewhere else in it. For the record, a periplum is a form of reckoning, a form of navigation, the way Odysseus moves through *The Odyssey*—it's a navigation between the stars and the coast. And it's also the narrative of a journey that maps itself that way. For tens of thousands of years, we moved through space not with maps but by knowing where

the sun was, and that star, and that point of that mountain. Which meant that you knew where the most intimate people in your world were—your lover, your ancestors, your children—by the farthest point in space. I'm fascinated by that.

I also learned, or maybe not, that one shouldn't title a book from a word like *periplum* that no longer exists in the language, because most folks don't know what you're talking about! And I just did it again with *The Outernational*—but again, it's about creating this kind of mapless space in which the poem becomes a formal means of reckoning. Fifteen years after my first book I'm still fascinated by what comes from outside of me, from a much larger position. Meaning: there's you and me sitting here, and then this vast sky above us. Why am I interested in that? I guess it's because it shows how incredibly fragile and lucky we are to be here—this is it, we only get this moment. And I am interested in how a voice in a poem can capture this larger sense of things and put it into a meaningful relation.

You begin Some Values of Landscape and Weather with "A History of the Lyric" and end the book with the line, "No better time than the present." How do you see your poems engaging the past, in contrast to or in relation to the present?

I think that the past or tradition is realized in the present, consciously or not, and that is the incredible pressure I feel in the work. Otherwise, it would be just a pastime or entertainment. By trying to establish a history of the lyric, what one is really addressing or voicing is lyric history. All real art makes us reconsider tradition—not as a fixed canonical body that exists behind us or bears us up, but as something we move toward. We find it reading back through those very works that were ahead of their own time—in the poems of Emily Dickinson or William Carlos Williams or Jack Spicer, for instance. If this model of discovery teaches us anything,

it's that tradition is, in fact, always just ahead of us. Something we are always approaching. . . .

Your poems do point to, and draw from, a giant history—for instance, in Some Values of Landscape and Weather Edgar Allan Poe not only shows up but shares space with other literary precursors.

To me naming Poe is like naming a tree—he's absolutely real and a part of the living landscape now. And we could say that Whitman is the ground we walk on in the American language. We can see Whitman's presence in the Moderns (Eliot, Pound, Stevens), and his effect is also here in our present. I find that kind of reading—the adventure of listening—a form of love, and enormously gratifying. That a new work can have these sonic relations and also be wholly itself. But I guess it's because I'm a poet. To paraphrase Spicer, he said, "I don't understand people who aren't poets who read poetry, because poets get the messages." As I've gotten older and done the work of reading and rereading poets, I've realized, "Oh, that's what he's talking about: *these* in fact are the messages." It's not something I can illustrate exactly. It's more a sense of affinity when reading another poet. The "message" is not a particular meaning per se, it's how meaning is made, its expression.

In another interview you quote William Carlos Williams, "If it ain't a pleasure, it ain't a poem"—can you describe the ways you find a poem pleasurable?

It is an experience of an inner emotional and intellectual life alive and unfolding. It has a sense of numinous reality that is open. The deep, satisfying, symphonic mind conducted through the sonic frequency of language. When a moment—when either reading or writing—lights up and reveals consciousness itself, free of expression, implacable, impersonal, alive and singing. Or when I am reading Melville or Stein, H.D. or Brathwaite (to offer different models), it's the simple fact of a body listening to itself as

it makes its measure and meaning in the world, as it creates a world. And that poetry has given me a context to live my life—maybe not always a “pleasure,” but the experience is certainly total.

I'm interested in your sense of community—you seem to be active in, and personally as well as aesthetically connected to, all sorts of poetry communities.

Well, I definitely read widely. I like to make my own choices—I don't let a specific community determine what I read and what I don't read. That's the downside of any scene which can sometimes manifest itself as social policing or as hierarchy, whether it's on the left or the right: it can create a certain laziness or unuseful categories. For my part, I didn't start to be a poet so that I could be this type of poet or that type of poet—I don't think any poet does.

But communities have been generative, even necessary, to many young poets.

Yes. I'm saying let's take it from there and then stay open. Because a community is both you and me sitting here, as well as all the poets influencing this later great tradition. That's why I was drawn to a very bookish, almost at times schoolmarmish poet like Jack Spicer—in his first letter to Lorca he says tradition is “generations of different poets in different countries patiently telling the same story, writing the same poem, gaining and losing something with each transformation—but, of course, never really losing anything.” And I think that if poems are really working, they are thinking about some kind of futurity—even if they're talking about loss.

And yet, as you said earlier, you love to trace the influence of poets—and didn't you study classics in college?

Yes, I studied Greek and Latin, I studied ancient lit. And I'm one of those people who was bitten by the Pound bug. As quote-unquote globalism

continues, how much better will we be able to read him fifty or a hundred years from now? What was he pointing toward? It gave me a rich education: because of him, I read ancient and medieval literatures. When I was a teenager, I began with the Beats, Rimbaud, Homer, Shakespeare, Hawthorne, Whitman, but I never read just one stream. To me the tradition is much larger than just the recent postwar “raw and the cooked,” as Lowell broke it down. I didn’t want to think of it in those terms.

I’m definitely indebted to the poets I knew in my twenties; I’m also indebted to poets who participated in my journal *o-blek*, and later, *The Exact Change Yearbook*. At that time they gave me a community to dwell in, a body of literature to study. Ultimately, editing is all about generosity: writers give you the work, and you put the work in some kind of constellation, some kind of useful relation—and it informs new communities, new readers. That’s where I went to school—more than to Brown or Buffalo per se—it was my journal that gave me a primary education. I was already thirty and had published six issues of *o-blek* by the time I went off to grad school. The reason I was attracted to those graduate programs—besides not having to wait tables at night and be a grounds crewman by day—and to poets like Keith Waldrop and C. D. Wright and Robert Creeley and Charles Bernstein and Susan Howe, was because I was already doing the magazine, and they liked it and were a part of it. They were also all very kind and extremely intelligent people. I never really thought about it—I just did it. But it led me here.

Tell me how o-blek started.

Just after I finished at NYU I met Connell McGrath—a mutual friend who wanted to start a hipster mag like *Details* introduced us. It was the eighties, and we were both totally uninterested. Instead, we both wanted to start a poetry journal (Connell was then an intern at the *Paris Review*), so I wrote letters to the poets I admired with a list of what we imagined

the first issue to be. And literally everyone, except for one person, sent work. It was like, "Now what do we do?"

How did you define that list of people?

As good poets, I guess. They were the writers I had been reading at that time. To me they were working out of a modernist tradition. Rosmarie Waldrop and Keith Waldrop, Fanny Howe, Clark Coolidge, Michael Palmer, Claude Royet-Journoud, Marjorie Welish, Paul Metcalf, Emmanuel Hocquard, John Yau were all poets from the first issue, and then later it attracted the work of Bernadette Mayer, John Godfrey, John Ashbery, Barbara Guest, James Schuyler, Robin Blaser, Rae Armantrout, Lyn Hejinian, Nathaniel Mackey, Alice Notley, and many others—all poets who had come out of an international avant-garde. I met the Waldrops when I was fourteen or so through my brother Michael, who studied with Keith in the early seventies. From them and their press, Burning Deck, I discovered many, many poets. When I was a teenager I used to visit my brother in Providence, and he'd show me stuff and I'd see books on his shelves that he was reading. I'd say, Wow, what's that? and I'd check it out. As a boy I remember we used to listen to Dylan Thomas records, and Auden records, and Orson Welles reading "The Raven"—that kind of stuff. I realize when I look back on it now, it just seemed part of life. I was much younger than everybody in my family. My other brother Tom is a singer-songwriter, and songs were really the form I most connected with, but I didn't play an instrument. And I wasn't a great English student either. I was a stutterer, a stammerer—so no one encouraged me that way. I used to think it was because of my brothers that I've come to do what I've done, but thirty years now out of that household, it's not that simple, it's much more private and ultimately mysterious or stranger than I could have ever projected. I suffered some losses at an early age, and I remember when I was thirteen when I read Shakespeare's tragedies for the first time

I imagined in them the voices of people I had lost. In fact, I still think the dead do speak through literature. What I was looking for in literature back then, what I was imagining . . . I don't know. All I know is I got hip to Ezra Pound and the Beats and John Ashbery when I was seventeen or eighteen, and I really went to school in that tradition.

This was through your brother?

More through my Spanish and Latin teacher at high school. A poet and translator named Pete Thompson. It turns out he was also a student of Keith Waldrop—he went to Brown in the late sixties, early seventies, where he did his work on the late Artaud. And he gave me Pound, he gave me the Beats; I also went to my first poetry readings with him. We left campus to go see Allen Ginsberg read, two different times.

And this was in Pittsfield?

No, New Hampshire. I went to five high schools, and ended up at a school with an Outward Bound component—I had dreams of winter camping and all that stuff. I was young . . . I have no idea whose body that was now, but I guess I was quite hardy in my teens. My first fall semester I read the *Odyssey* for the first time, and I remember writing a paper—it's embarrassing, but I really felt as though I was its reader; that it had traveled through all this time just for me. It was the figure of Telemachus most of all. He was the reader . . . he was all of us. And the poem seemed to say everything: you could read so many public and private emotions, histories, psychologies, into it. My body was on fire when I read it. Years later, I ended up doing my BA thesis on Plutarch's *Lives* and Homeric figures and their relation to certain ideas of personhood and excellence.

Your earlier work, and the poems in Artificial Heart, are peopled with children—and they also show up in poems like “Stung” from The Outernationale. What do children, and a child’s view, mean to or allow for you as a poet?

I have often wondered that myself. To me, childhood is not a stable condition—certainly not safe, and certainly not unaware. More a condition of sonar, an emotional sonar of sorts. I grew up late, as it were, in every way. I am the last child in my family—my parents were, like me, the youngest in their families, with much older siblings (and siblings who were born in Italy, my parents being born here). All this is to say I was born into a highly evolved discursive space and was/am always late to the conversation, and I had always to be listening to catch up or to see where I might participate in the story and find my own sense of relevance. I tried to write this in an early exercise that became the poem “Thirty Sentences for No One.” The belatedness I experienced in my family dovetailed with my understanding of the history of the art.

If the condition of adulthood means being able to make choices that shape personhood, then we live in a culture in which we are infantilized—i.e., not allowed fundamental choices in the direction of the government—and therefore we remain in an unstable, dangerous state. This dangerous state feels metaphorically “out-of-doors” to me, outside the discourse of power and this out-of-doors (or outer) position or voice has proved useful to imagine selfhood or to make a voice that is at once neglected and empowered because of it. I think of the line “It’s good to be dead in America” from “Revival,” or “start from nothing and belong to it” from “The Outernationale,” for example.

Can you talk more about the difference between writing short poems, long poems, and serial poems—how do you find each propels or delimits the poem for you?

When I begin writing I often feel the result will be a longish poem, or at least I have that desire. The space into which I compose seems immense, or at the very least momentous, and it needs duration to be properly realized. Shorter poems come to say what their reality is very quickly, as if the discussion has been ongoing and here is a piece of it—or by saying less, it says its piece. Longer poems tend to be more voluble in their discursiveness—I can fold more into them. I love it when I can extend the surface and the location of the poem across a larger vocal fabric. And seriality for me is an admixture of the two gestures above—a larger order happening in discrete units. I think my longer poems behave like a ribbon or a tape loop or Möbius strip that moves vertically. And I think of serial poems as film frames that happen horizontally.

You've talked about the poetry's similarity to film—can you expand upon that? I think film and fiction have more in common.

For me film language is closer to lyric poetry than it is to fiction. Most likely because I'm interested in both modes of expression. Film language is unavoidable—it's part of our unconscious, our desires, memories, etc., and is very captivating and powerful. I went to NYU in my twenties to study film but quickly changed my major to literature and then ancient literature. Maybe now looking back I can see that the connection to ancient language and film has to do with origins of expression. Film is a relatively new language technology of our recent human history (i.e., we are in its early phases), and if silent film is like cuneiform or hieroglyph, we might say classic film language of the thirties and forties is like Greek and Latin. I don't know—it's just something I can see now.

Like poetry, film tells a story by compressing time, and through an emotive, image-based structure. There is a syntax of images, a rhythm. And it works with light—a material light. Not a major observation, but still an endlessly fascinating medium—light I mean. It gives relief to a void or a darkness, opacity of being. In some way it makes a reality out of the darkness. I love the opening to Beckett's late novel *Company*, too: "A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine." That the book is titled *Company* but the voice comes to "one." It's a wonderful description of how it is to be in a cinema, an inherently public experience—to be alone together connected by images and phantasms of light and shadow, dreams. But it's also a wonderful correlative to being alone in one's room, in one's library, memory, alone together in one's books, and a voice comes to one, and then a poem begins. A world comes to one. And for a moment you are your self and another becoming another thing, a poem.

Are you ever overwhelmed by the sensory aspect of cinema?

Yes. I used to think that if film existed during the medieval period, they would never have built any of those cathedrals. I think of those structures as a kind of medieval cinema. The incense, colored windows, frescoes, the images or stations—are all meant to overload the senses, open up the body for a spiritual awakening. In film the passion is built purely out of light—it's in fact a material light . . . I almost titled my last book *The Poetics of Light*, but I felt that was too handbookish and shut the poems down in some way. My poems do seem more and more obsessed with light—but I think it's always been there. I am interested though in a poetics of light—a way of reading and seeing its fluid materiality as a phenomenon that comes from far away and in a time frame much larger than our own. It comes to us in a periodicity outside our own. I would say my interest in light is ultimately related to capturing or depicting time.

At your reading last night, you described the poem “The Outernationale” as your version of a hell canto. Can you talk more about that poem, and the title in general? Is it in any way a response to the famous French socialist song “The Internationale”?

The poem was written coming out of winter into spring—this is why the epigraph is from Williams’s *Kora in Hell*. Poems are creatures of seasons, too—like now and never, or here and oblivion. But the title behaves in many ways—its meanings are still evolving as I continue to read the poems in the book. It’s about making meaning from the outer edges of meaning and peripheral observations, how the outer and inner or fleeting and vast correspond. For me, the outernationale is a territory—a kind of lived vocal fabric, a material sound that might have sculptural dimensions, as in a habitable territory of the poem or the book, as it were.

In relation to “The Internationale,” I grew up in small upstate mill towns, and as I’ve said, my parents come from an immigrant culture that worked hard to participate in and assimilate the ideals and idioms of the American mid-twentieth century. They weren’t part of the utopian vision of a labor movement that that song so uniquely captures. I would say their experience wasn’t international but outernational—they, my relatives, being outside the discourse of power and prestige. Which is also not to imply their work and story was or is in any way irrelevant—it’s not. I would like to show the measure of things and their interconnectedness. But *outer* also implies the extreme of a boundary, and I imagine when I am working I want to compose just at the boundaries of the known—to find a way to write at the edge of an already impacted history and world which is where we always already are at all times . . . part of a vast, unstable, multiplying narrative . . . the ongoing story. I mean to say, back to your community question, I feel the title obliquely speaks as well to the sense that, strictly speaking, poets aren’t international either but outernational. In some fundamental way we, our work, exists in time (or time exists in it), even if

unacknowledged, and is also a part of this ongoing story. Oppen's revision of Shelley, that "poets are the legislators of the unacknowledged world," has always been attractive to me in that sense that we rescue each other's work and build out of it. We record the pieces of other songs, of people and their everyday struggle of living, of things coming into being even as they are lost within a larger story.

What I love about outernationale is the way its prefix turns the term on its head—and it's wild that you seem to be playing with this idea through the repeated suffixes like -obic, -etic, -istic in the second title poem!

When I was writing that poem, I remember reading back through a draft and misreading a word broken by a line and thinking, yes, that sounds much better as just the piece of the word. It's mostly a sound element. Sound tends to work in a number of ways for me, to keep new information coming in and to handle it—the present, I mean. I hear the list of suffixes as a stutter or a stammer. In this digital age, it's almost like the skipping of a damaged CD—like something's spinning in place—or the elisions of text-messaging. Our moment is also caught up in the idea of end-times—the constant news stream of "the world is over." For example, I remember as a kid *National Geographic* was this wonder of information, but now when I see it at the dentist's or doctor's and the cover story is about the death of the ocean, or the heating up of the planet and the loss of greenbelts, or the extinction of multiple species, etc.—it's a very different message. The litany of suffixes or "endings" was a way of prolonging, interrupting, this idea of being at a threshold, or at an extreme, and complicating it. Again, I'm not only interested in a history of the lyric but in a more ontologically complex reality of lyric history. And by accentuating the edges of things, of meaning, in this very active period of change and shifting scales from global politics to climate change to the shifting of national borders, what remains, and what has remained constant, is the poem.

Who is the "I" in your poems?

Well, it's me and not me. When I write, it's something just next to me—the observing *I*. To speak with an honest interplay of knowing and not-knowing. For me if a poem is a closed, contained vessel, it's dead on arrival; instead, I want to leave some part of the poem open so that I or another reader can enter it again and again. In a poem the *I* is always the reader as well as the poet. Poems that work for me have a kind of stereoscopic depth. With a stereoscope, you have the illusion of seeing all three dimensions, but it's unstable, or elusive, and yet it's there, right in front of your eyes.

A HOOD IS LIKE AN ANCIENT CHALICE

Oni Buchanan

A hood is like an ancient chalice
filled with another time, a time
before I was born, a quiet
time in which my
head can sleep, eyes
sinking back into the black
cavity, eyes setting further
and further beneath
the horizon, below the rim
of manmade lights, cool,
untethered from their stems

A hood is like a pristine puddle
in which my head can loosen
its stripped bolts, and the water
around my loosened head
seeps in through the cranial plates
and meanders through the
crevices of my brain, prying
in its course the dirty matter
from the coils. All the dirt
in my brain floats way up, away,
to the surface of the puddle,
and the dense matter sinks,
my skull, and the intelligent matter
is like electricity. When I think,

my brain electrocutes itself
inside the puddle of my hood

A hood is like a maroon canoe
and the head inside it like a body
lying long in the canoe—the body in the hull,
and around the hull, the water,
and around the hull,
the lull, so the body cradled
in the timeless hem of water, the body
sewn underwater in a pocket opening upwards,
and breathing from that pocket—
And the sky too pours out from the pocket,
erupts in blue, as if the body
from its ticking chest was gashed
and from the fissure, ribbons flew,
blue ribbons streaming out
like daylight kites to merge and blur—
The descending eye glimpses
from its rocking casket a satin rupture
of some more objective
self, some assemblage
of matter, floating matter of
undetermined density equivalent
to the water it displaced

MAROON CANOE

o canoe, maroon canoe
over mesmeric waves we row
over an azure ionian sea
over mariners' mum communion
over icarus's un-ascension
over men-o'-war + runner missions
over ice-run ruins, over anxious cruises
over seismic omens + vesuvian ooze
we row, we row
ravenous sea, reassure me
reserve me an amnesia, caesura,
a serene unconscious ease

o canoe, maroon canoe
we row in seven rains + six monsoons
we row in summer snows
seven seasons wax + wane
we row near sorceress circe's manor
(six + seven swine nurse acorns, en masse aware)
we row near sirens + swoon severe
(voices immerse us, caress our ears in razor arias),
we row near mermen, oceanic emissaries on a wave
our oars announce us in murmur, in susurrous music
sonorous sea, connoisseur in snare: un-accuse, excuse me
aeonic erosion, receive me, examine + rewire
cure me + rename

a carmine sun commences an aurora, an amorous soiree
one moon arc answers in romance

orion rises + canis minor carves noir
a near aroma—some essence, some evanescence—
arouses in me remorse + reminiscence:
some once omission, some non-reunion, some
mirror version, some overcome
evasion, a misnomer, a woe, a sorrow—o canoe,
maroon canoe, o sea swerve, o
ceremonious casanova,
o crimson sea serene,
unweave our sinuous maze, our nexus
renew me, new—no
secrecies, evasion—
a sum immersion in a now

o raw maria on moon, o unison sun,
o universe worn in unconcern,
issue a summons, convene + reconvene
+ answer me
is a souvenir a sorrow sewn
are cocoons meaner secrecies
is erasure a crime
is reverence so rare
is an error ever overcome

soon, maroon canoe; soon, reservoir severe: a missive scriven in cruor,
in rime

AND I JUST STOOD THERE...

Michael Leong

with my brain like a chambered nautilus
with my hands like drunken sailors
with my tongue like a headless jack-in-the-box
with my jugular like the Strait of Bosphorus
with my innards like a hall of mirrors
with my fingernails like poker chips recklessly squandered
with my spine like the wick of a candle
with my spine like a run-on sentence
with my spine like cubic zirconia
with my chest like a continental breakfast
with my appendix like the Bodleian library
with my femur like an overpriced bottle opener
with my eyebrows like the beard of Hephaestus
with my toes like inert rhombuses
with my lips like a monk's tonsure
with my mouth like a Rorschach test
with my forearms like a friendly game of curling
with my eyes like tautological thought balloons
with my eyes like Styrofoam peanuts
with my eyes like lazy Susans
with my stomach like a muted trumpet
with my voice box like a Rubik's Cube
with my earlobes like rinds of cantaloupe
with my knees like faceless effigies
with my coccyx like a third-place trophy
with my epidermal regions bearing much resemblance to Silly Putty
with my forehead like an expired driver's license
with my hair like flavored dental floss

with my hair like a clip-on tie
with my heart playing dead and my spleen
 being fashionably late
with my cheekbones like mathematics
with my arms akimbo like the hinges of fate
with my hands in my pockets like amateur spelunkers
with my mouth like a horoscope, like a lunar calendar,
 like a wrinkled snood
with my throat like a Geiger counter gone haywire
with my nose like an absurd fulcrum
with my sternum like the epicenter
 of a barely aborted earthquake
with my ribs like fingers folded in prayer

THE CHAT

Sampson Starkweather

—a transcontemporation of Max Jacob

Poor woman, all her time spent talking to God, a two-way radio. How did she manage with just one walkie-talkie? "The other one's in a field, scares away the blackbirds." Since you can talk to God and he knows everything, can you ask him when this war will be over? I asked. She just stood there. Then she opened up her blouse and I could see she had several little breasts, like a cat.

POST ORIFICE

Lara Glenum

My neighbor (a.k.a. "the Rooster")
started maling
 protoplasmic goo into my bone pagoda
He began maling me spermatozoid valentines

He was going postal
He was maling all over me

In the male I discovered coupons
 for torch songs & a notice
for Mr. Humpty's Charity Ball
 In the male
I received an invitation to a language-den
of squealing verbs
 tied to signposts
I received a finger
in my male-hole I wagged it at my neighbor
 grinding his mewling pelt
into my feathered lawn

At the Post Orifice
 I mailed "the Rooster"
an invoice for thirty-odd coxcombs
Mr. Oddcock, I said,
 You are invited for teeth & cookies

HISTORICAL REENACTMENT OF THE CAVE

The pink glass swan
creams at the mouth
 drops an egg down

 the meat tube

Place my large organs under glass
Drape a skin over my freeze-dried jerking
Glue
a hairball onto my forehead to give me
 a "furrowed maternal brow"

Stand me by the polyurethane fire
in saber-tooth lace stockings

A tattooed fetus in my mouth

LYRIC FOR LAURA INGALLS WILDER

Nicholas Reading

The well, full
of three days' rain, offers only the wet bucket.
Her child's hands

pull the rope. She stares and then smashes the thing
against her head.
If father would return, mother would come

back to life.
There is a baby in the house and the small girl
left to wait

with him licks her lips. Maybe she'll crouch and
snag a rabbit.
Rain might come again. The evening hours are spent

with tables of wax,
a bassinet lined with crumbs and a song blessing the taste
of jerky and cotton.

Morning will bring a mouse tail like a rattle
shaking from the mouth.
Write it down and mark the moon's constant stare.

THE OCEAN FLOOR

Kazim Ali

Dreamt of being under a spell
A creature prisoned to the ocean floor

What decades I spell looking up
Through acres of water to surface light

The black ovals of ship hulls passing over
Sound travels so slowly

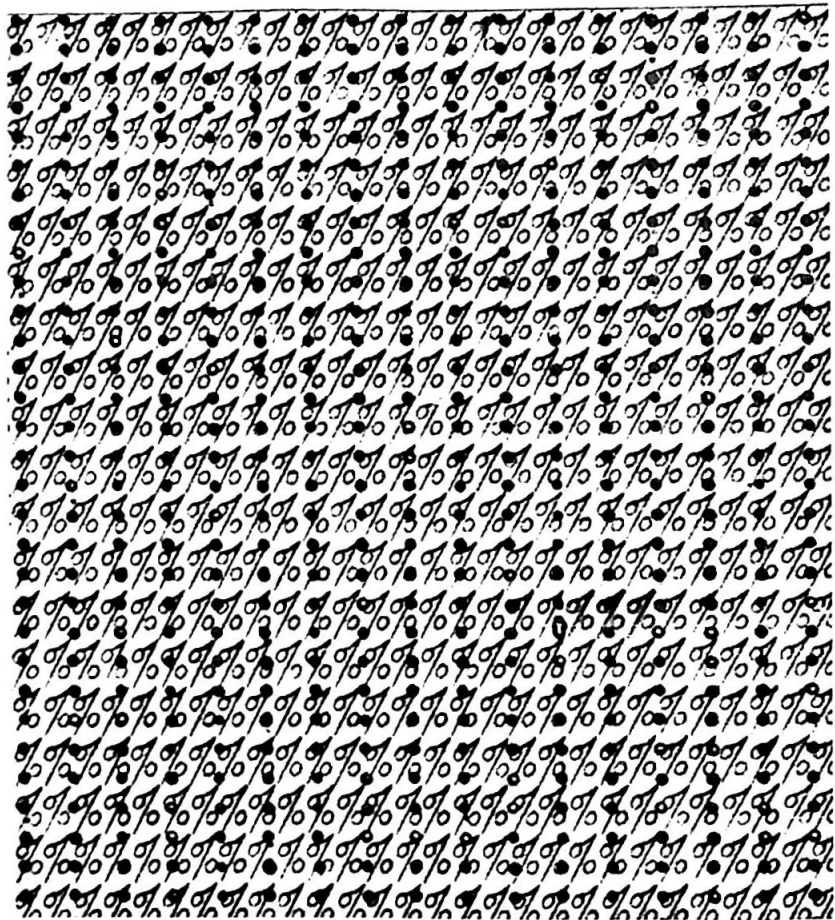
At the bottom of the ocean
Somehow not drowning

My supposed deafness fishes
from the water the sound of an orchestra

In which all the instruments play separately
from one another and out of tune

from ON WEAVING

Anni Albers



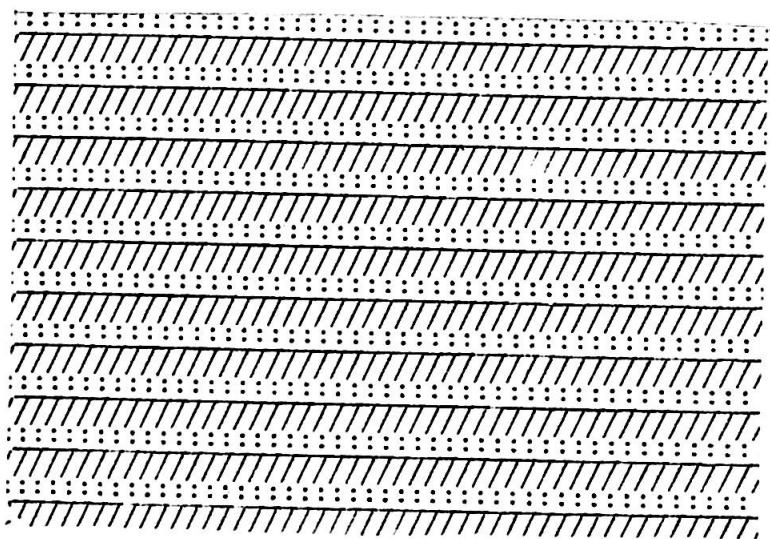
Detail from page 76

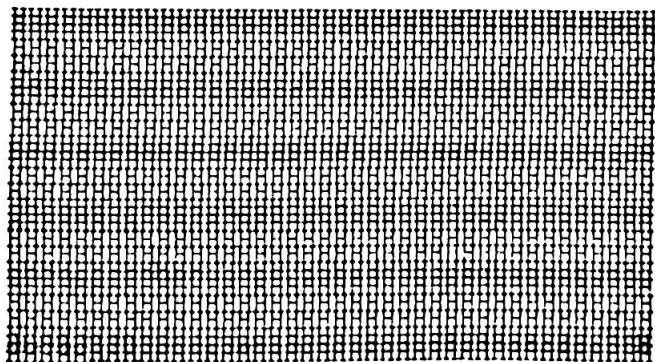
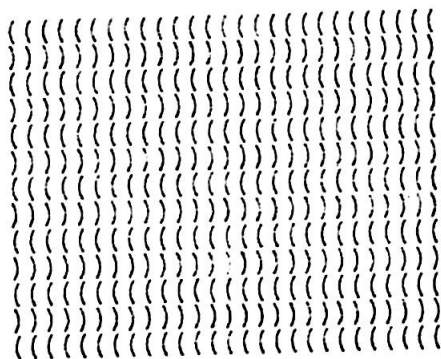
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

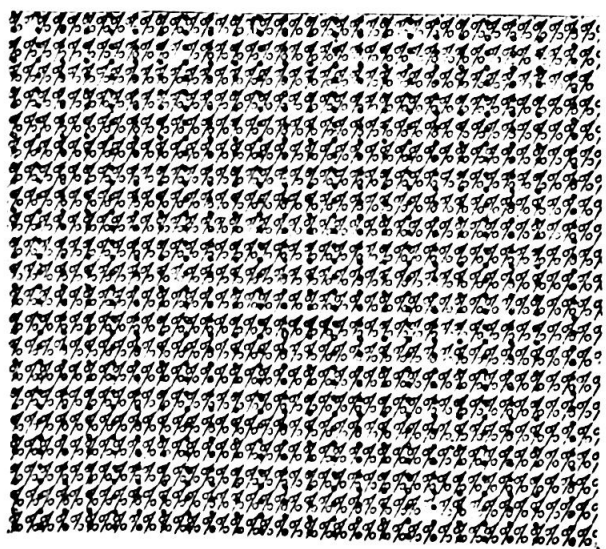
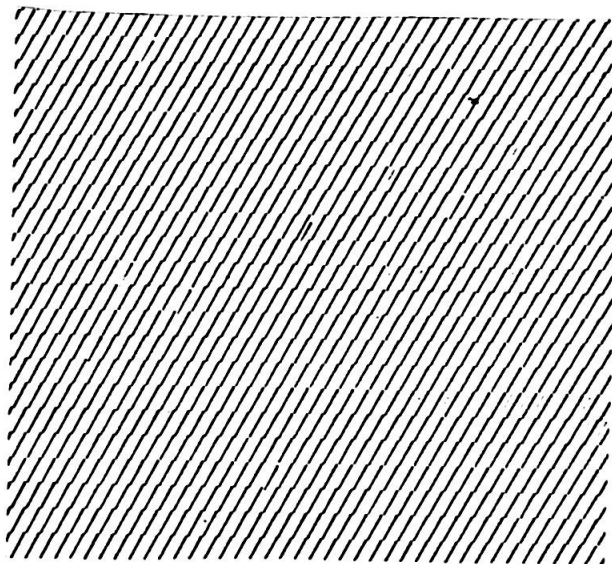
Anni Albers, born in Berlin in 1899, was the foremost textile designer of the twentieth century; she was also a weaver, writer, and printmaker. At twenty-three she enrolled at the Bauhaus, where she met her husband, the painter Joseph Albers. They taught at Black Mountain College from 1933 to 1949 and eventually moved to Connecticut, where she died in 1994.

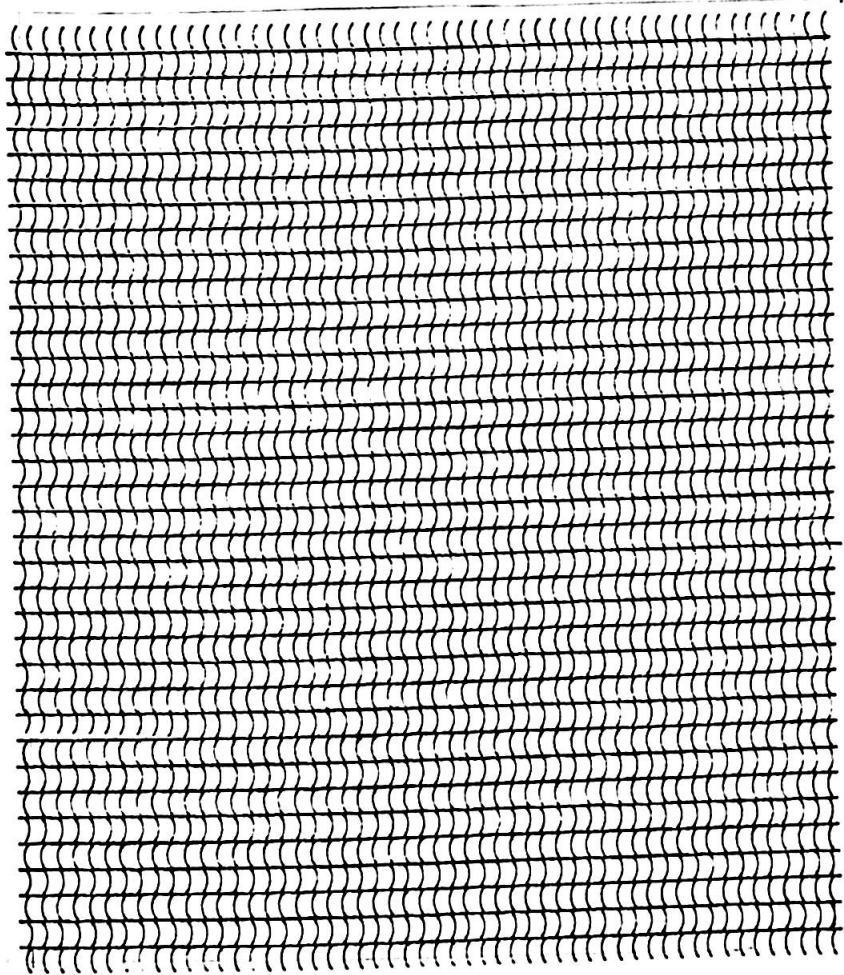
Albers was the first textile artist to have a solo show at the Museum of Modern Art, and her work has also been featured at the Busch-Reisinger Museum at Harvard University, the Baltimore Museum of Art, the Museum Neue Sammlung, the Bauhaus Archiv, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Cooper-Hewitt Museum. Her numerous honors include the Medal of the American Institute of Architects in the field of Craftsmanship and a gold medal from the American Crafts Council.

The drawings reprinted here are taken from *On Weaving* (Wesleyan University Press, 1965). Each is a $10\frac{3}{4} \times 6\frac{3}{4}$ inch sheet of cardboard marked up in a pattern of typewritten letters and punctuation.

[illegible]







FROM THIS VANTAGE POINT YOUR VIEW WILL BE CLEAR

Lisa Olstein

Any shift in philosophy introduces the need for new habits of body. I am learning how gently to lift them, to turn them swiftly and rest them again, on their wings, wings to table, which I sand smooth each morning. To do it with no fluttering, with as little as possible. It is a strange gymnastics, their bodies, mine: what to grasp, when to release, the nature of a turn, the will of the whole channeled into the fingertips. It takes all my strength. It is necessary to practice, to imagine myself the moth, my arms its wings, my legs gone.

SOME SUPERIOR HEAVEN

Small crowds in the distance. It is the same for emergency as for celebration: clots of bodies gathering and dispersing. A boy lies dead in a field. I don't know what killed him. I know his face, his habit of walking. We never spoke, but this was not unfriendly. He was found and his family was brought. One by one they move into the field and lie beside him. He will never enter their home again.

WHEN THE CONSOLATIONS GROW TOO FEW

One has emerged with insufficient wing. We cannot know if the defect was inevitable or born of some misfortune. Wing drying is precarious: if in the first minute each is not properly unfurled, there is no possibility of repair. In this instance, the left fore is pinned back, a folded page. It will never fly. I noticed it on the floor where it must have fallen trying. It no longer tries. I offer the cripple-wing my finger. She drinks sugar water we set in puddles on a stool. Ilya works to devise a reservoir to place at the heart of a flower, one never-ending supply.

THOSE WHO HAVE EYES TO SEE

This morning a trader woke us with knocking at the door. A surprise. No one comes anymore. He has been away; he is just returned. He brings with him from the east a small box hung with string around his neck: two moths quite alive. I am filled with trepidation. We don't know what they require. It has been too long since we began blind, placing one kind of leaf before a mute specimen, another. In the beginning I thought the moths were without notice or concern, but I have recognized kindness in the way they move.

THE MILLION

Ordinarily there is very little flying: the hut is treated like the rough trunk of an enormous tree. But for two nights the air has filled with them skipping and hovering. The first we barely moved. The second we walked among them, wings brushing our faces. They are not wild any longer, not tame. In the bluing light they settle in twos, swaying slightly, as if far beneath a lapping surface. We sit useless, watching. We marvel at the immensity of their landscape. The hut is an echo chamber, every surface whispering. It is an exhaustive vigil. Pairs stay clasped together for hours.

A PATH WE LONG HAVE KNOWN

Needs arise: to remember, to insist, to forget. The moths' are straightforward: some things can be looked for and if unfound, done without; without some things, they die. Ilya tends to Ilya's alone, lately disappearing from the hut for an hour or two, a day. Once this might have thrilled me or done me harm. Now I let it. It lets me. In the quiet, we are fine.

HAMMER HEAD

Patrick Culliton

Cow of sleep, take my arm.
Slide me like a sponge
across the sky's filthy countertop.
Close these looking balls, friend.
Force me to knit the toothy
threads of hours. Preach to me
from your garden of warm papers.

Cow of sleep, please unfasten this brain
belt. Turn off this pig music.
Fill this room with your fat,
white quiet. Disarm these flies,
these memories upsetting my laze.
Inject me with your sharpest December
and let me spread, lovely as a lake.

I KNOW NOT SINCE WHEN

Osip Mandelstam

I know not since when
This little song began—
Is this what the thief scratches against,
The one the mosquito prince sings?

I would like to talk
About nothing once more,
To scratch a match, to push
The night awake with my shoulder;

To throw haystacks and haystacks apart,
And that heavy hat of air;
To rend, to tear the sack
Where the caraway is packed.

To find the pink blood's link—
The tinkle of these dried herbs—
To find the purloined link
Across age, hayloft, and sleep.

Translated from the German by Ilya Bernstein.

I SAW THE LIGHT

Kevin Young

We'll sweep up the ashes in the morning
—Gram Parsons

Just wing it—

doused in whisky, disguised
in flammable polyester

as a funeral director,
the hearse you hijack

will drag the stolen coffin
to the desert, sparing the body

being flown home
to Louisiana, there buried—

the deceased wanted
to be burned, someone overheard.

The ripening remains.

The reaping goes
on without us

seeing—no longer do we bathe
our own dead.

Busy yourself,

being not yet buried—

The body you steal
may well be your own—

In my hour of darkness

in my time of need
buy a six pack, and gasoline

enough to get you
there, enough to pour

down the thirsty throat
of death—soaking the body

beleaguered, bet against—
your garments rent.

Beg the light
to linger. The blaze you build

will shine the night
like a shoe—

a thin wick
against the dark.

If heaven, if anything
after, then

it too burns bright—
for a time—

LANDSCAPE

Joshua Harmon

So: halogen noontime: a covert life
lives a reluctance and scraps farewell: that

old inside, obligingly, whatever
flush of sun otherwise unmoved:

the day won't reconcile its recessive light:
a perimeter's bleed: interface of hill-

side and skyline obliges: dyad
of bodies: where there's one there's another:

overtaken day: and day parachutes
and settles: bewildered sun-sick bulb

SANGUINARIA

Suzanne Heyd

How a garden insists
its seeds grow from
memory, hollows
open the body, releases
a vowel. Once in me like
red pearls the sound
of grief and love spilled
from its root. I was not
stranded. I marked
each o with a scar.

ABSTRACT PRACTICES

THE ART OF JOAN MITCHELL, BARBARA GUEST,
AND THEIR OTHERS

Maggie Nelson

As the dust of the twentieth century settles, it's quite possible that many artists, writers, and critics would identify the move away from "the impediment of 'representation,' all that easy mimicry, etc." (as Robert Creeley has put it) and toward differing forms of "abstraction" as one of—if not the—defining impulse in both verbal and visual art. In the 1970s Creeley went so far as to assert that this move "gave us, in short, what art we have had in the last fifty years. At least that" (Yau, 52), and many would probably (if grudgingly) agree.

But throughout the modernist period, for every Wallace Stevens who stayed busy elaborating the idea of a Supreme Fiction that "must be abstract," there was also a William Carlos Williams proclaiming "No ideas but in things!" As Wendy Steiner has observed about the many literary modernists who came out "on the side of things" (whatever that might mean), "writer after writer—no matter how hermetically his work was cut off from the 'average reader'—vowed his hatred of abstraction" (183). And while Creeley himself celebrates abstraction as *the* major event of twentieth-century art, he also adds this caveat: "[D]anger is very much present in the too simple concept: 'abstraction.' The idea of it, rather than the practice" (Yau, 52). Similarly, Gertrude Stein—who perhaps worked harder than any other writer in the twentieth century to disrupt the tradition of mimesis as metaphor for or goal of artistic practice—was also quite wary of abstraction, which she famously deemed "pornographic."¹

Given these recurrent tensions, it may make more sense to highlight not abstraction per se as the twentieth century's overriding obsession, but rather the negotiation a work of art makes between its dual status as a sign of the thing-world and a part of the thing-world. This negotiation certainly has its roots in modernism (in Duchamp's readymades, in the cubist collages of Picasso and Braque, in Stein's nonrepresentational still lifes and portraiture, and so on), but in retrospect also appears the animating force of much else: Pollock's drip paintings, Rauschenberg's combines, Warhol's soup cans, Robert Smithson's earthworks, Carolee Schneemann's body art, and so on. It also continues to shape much contemporary debate about American poetry—a debate which still worries over whether poetry should privilege “the word over the world.” In the past few decades, the varying debates about Language writing and its challenges have presented the most salient example: in his 1993 book *After the Death of Poetry*, for instance, Vernon Shetley compares the chilly poles of New Formalism and Language writing to conclude that poetry's cultural reputation has been lost, and can only be restored if it manages to strike some kind of balance between the two extremes—i.e., if the poetry of the future can “bring together the authority of skeptical reflection with that of experience. Neither is adequate by itself” (191).

Some feminists might scoff at this fuzzy, seemingly outdated dichotomy of “reflection” versus “experience,” but a similar split continues to run through feminist conversations about women's writing. The 1999 Barnard conference, for example, hopefully titled “Where Lyric Tradition Meets Language Poetry: Innovation in Contemporary American Poetry by Women,” ended up mostly underscoring the divide; as Frances Richard later observed about the event in the Spring/Summer 2000 issue of *Fence* magazine, it was as if “the poetic spectrum had collapsed to navel-gazing lyric or egg-headed language and the twain could never meet” (87). In another statement published in *Fence* after the conference, the organizers (Claudia Rankine and Allison Cummings) asked almost plaintively,

"might the opposition between object and representation be addressed in other, less combative terms?" (126)

This chapter addresses this question through a consideration of the "abstract practices" of the painter Joan Mitchell and the poet Barbara Guest. Creeley's phrase is important here not only because it emphasizes the decades-long commitment to her artistic practice that both Mitchell and Guest made, but also because it serves a helpful reminder of the fact that "abstract is not a style," as Mitchell was fond of saying. Indeed, regardless of its hold on the twentieth-century imagination, "abstraction" is not any one thing (as a cursory walk through a gallery containing works by artists such as Kandinsky, Miró, Rothko, Agnes Martin, Robert Ryman, Bridget Riley, and Amy Sillman, for example, would quickly make clear). Similarly, the various kinds of abstraction explored by writers of the past century or so are nothing if not diverse: no one would say that Mallarmé, Stein, Creeley, Celan, and Ashbery, for example, contend with abstraction in the same, or even similar, ways. What's more, as Wendy Steiner reminds us, when it comes to abstraction, the painting-literature analogy is by no means a simple one, complicated as it is by "the ability of painting to be utterly abstract and the corresponding inability of literature to be so, since it is composed of words that have preexisting meanings" (65–66). The complexity of this analogy only deepens when one contends with the broad, slippery, and often vague employment of the word "abstract" by critics, artists, and writers alike, and the confusions that can arise when the word gets dragged across multiple disciplines.²

The work of both Mitchell and Guest speaks generously and provocatively to Rankine and Cummings's question—"Might the opposition between object and representation be addressed in other, less combative terms?"—but I want to make clear at the outset that I'm not holding them up as examples of artists who've somehow "bridged the gap," so to speak. Such a goal doesn't strike me as possible or even desirable. As O'Hara

demonstrated in his statement for Allen's *New American Poetry* (1960), it's the mysterious movement between the concrete and the abstract that can be so much fun: "It may be that poetry makes life's nebulous events tangible to me and restores their detail; or conversely, that poetry brings forth the intangible quality of incidents which are all too concrete and circumstantial. Or each on specific occasions, or both all the time" (420). In keeping with this vacillating spirit, I hope here to underscore how Guest and Mitchell are each central to their fields and periods, and at the same time to chart the ways in which their specific "abstract practices" represent an important mark of difference within them: Joan Mitchell's slowed-down, landscape-oriented practice of abstraction differs tremendously from the more well-known and mythologized accounts of New York School "action painting"; likewise, while Barbara Guest is endlessly referred to as the only woman poet in the first generation of the New York School, her work is often strikingly different from that of Ashbery, Koch, O'Hara, and Schuyler, and for a variety of reasons has not found an easy home in their "school."³ As far as I see it, one could easily consider each woman's work as either emblematic or disruptive of the terms of the movements with which it is associated—the first move aims to shifts them to the center, the second, to preserve the power of the margin. Both gestures have their temptations, but I suspect the tension between them is more engaging if left unresolved.

It's a daunting task to bring a feminist perspective to bear on artists famous for bristling at the very presence of the words "women" and "artist" in the same sentence. When asked to write a response to Linda Nochlin's famous 1971 article, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" Elaine de Kooning sent the following:

I was talking to Joan Mitchell once at a party ten years ago when a man came up to us and said, "What do you women artists think . . ." Joan grabbed my arm and said, "Elaine, let's

get the hell out of here." That was my first response to Linda Nochlin's essay. I was curious about how a man would react. Alex Katz thought it would be a cop-out to answer the piece. Sherman (Drexler) thought it would be a cop-out to not to answer it. John Cage thought the question "divisive and an over-simplification." I agree with all of them. (Hesse, 56)

"Let's get the hell out of here" seems to me an understandable response. But the progress of de Kooning's comment is telling, insofar as her next response is to canvass the important men in her life, as if a chorus of male opinion were a prerequisite to knowing what she wanted to say. She then takes an undeniable pleasure in agreeing with the men, and aligning against the feminist scholar. It's not an unusual stance, especially at that particular cultural moment: before the feminist movement (and, I'm sure some would argue, long after) such an attitude was something of a prerequisite for women to get in and stay in the conversation—the way to get ahead, get seen, get heard. Looking back on this period in a 1986 conversation with Nochlin, Mitchell elaborates on this aspect of the painting scene:

JOAN MITCHELL: . . . I think the women were, some of them, more down on women than the men.

LINDA NOCHLIN: Yeah, that's perfectly possible.

MITCHELL: [A lot, Like], you know.

NOCHLIN: But I just wondered whether the generally nonsupportive atmosphere for women artists, whether it's by fellow women, or by men, or by a general atmosphere, or what?

MITCHELL: Oh, I don't know. I adulated the men so much they sort of liked me. I mean, I thought Bill [de Kooning] was a great painter. They liked me.

NOCHLIN: Yeah, but I mean, they would have liked you if you weren't a painter, too. I mean, was there any feeling that. . . .

MITCHELL: I don't think. . . . No, no, [Conrad] Marca-Relli [shows at

McGee now] and Nic Carone [teaches at Studio School] in the Stable Gallery, they. . . . Hans Hofmann was very supportive—of me. I used to run into him in the park. I'd be dog-walking at nine in the morning, he'd say, "Mitchell, you should be painting." Very nice. (both chuckle) I don't think women in any way were a threat to these men, so they could encourage the "lady painter."

NOCHLIN: Umm. But what if you. . .

MITCHELL: Oh, no, I was very seriously involved in painting, they knew that.

NOCHLIN: Yeah.

MITCHELL: Philip Guston was very nice to me.

NOCHLIN: Yes. So you didn't feel any difference?

MITCHELL: Well, about what?

NOCHLIN: I mean, if you'd been a man painter?

MITCHELL: I would have had a lot easier time.

NOCHLIN: Yeah, okay. (n.p.)

At a different point in the conversation, still undaunted by the task of trying to needle some feminism or proto-feminism out of Mitchell, Nochlin pushes at her to say more about how it felt to be a woman painter amidst so many men. Mitchell responds: "How did I feel, like how? I felt, you know, when I was discouraged I wondered if really women couldn't paint, the way all the men said they [the women] couldn't paint. But then at other times I said, 'Fuck them,' you know."

As the above conversation may indicate, Mitchell was not big on feminism per se. But her "fuck them" sentiment is certainly of a piece with the immense effort made by feminists over the past thirty years or so to lay bare the misogyny which for centuries has posited women as the antithesis to abstraction or transcendence. Paul Valéry's summed up this attitude cogently in his remark: "*The more abstract an art, the fewer women there are who have made a name for themselves in that art*" (see Schor, 17). Annoying

as it is, I'd like this comment to haunt this chapter, as it may serve as a constant reminder of what was at stake for the women at the heart of the abstract expressionist enterprise.

Joan Mitchell's forty-year career of vigorous abstract painting stands in fierce defiance to such a dictum. Mitchell is constantly referred to as one of the strongest painters of the so-called second-generation of the New York School (a label that the so-called second-generation painters always chafed against, as one might expect). In the summer of 2002, the Whitney Museum housed a Mitchell retrospective at the same time that four New York galleries showed her work,⁴ hopefully further evidence that she is continuing to gather attention in the United States since her death in France in 1992. Mitchell had a lifelong investment in literature, and in poetry in particular—her mother, Marion Strobel, was a poet and a co-editor of the influential magazine *Poetry*; Mitchell was married for a time to Barney Rosset, the founder of Grove Press; O'Hara, Schuyler, and Ashbery were all important friends to her; she and Samuel Beckett were intimate confidantes in Paris; and she was a devoted fan of many other poets, including Rilke, Wordsworth, and Eliot. Mitchell often titled her paintings after poems by O'Hara (such as *To the Harbormaster* [1957] and *Ode to Joy* [1970–71]); in his Mitchell monograph, Klaus Kertess usefully relates the “extreme one-to-oneness between viewer and painting” in Mitchell's work to the kind of intimacy proposed in O'Hara's manifesto “Personism” (25). Mitchell also titled paintings after Schuyler poems (such as *A Few Days After II* [After James Schuyler], 1985), and in the mid-1970s she did a series of “color abstracts” to accompany the Schuyler poems “Sunset,” “Daylight,” and “Sunday.” She also collaborated with John Ashbery: in 1960, Tiber Press published 225 copies of a book of Ashbery poems accompanied by prints of Mitchell silkscreens, called *The Poems*. In addition to reviewing her work regularly, Ashbery also wrote the foreword to a 1992 Mitchell monograph.⁵

For all of these reasons, nearly every monograph on Mitchell begins

by citing the importance of poetry to her painting. (Judith Benstock's, for example, begins: "Several themes predominate Mitchell's painting. Poetry, generally, lyrical and rooted in nature, is foremost among these" [11].) In contrast, very few literary critics have paid much attention to the relationship between Mitchell's particular abstract idiom and New York School poetry, though Mitchell unavoidably pops up in historical accounts as a close friend of O'Hara's and one of the few female regulars at the Cedar Tavern (and one of the most ornery). In O'Hara's case, for many years the focus has remained on the parallel between his famed writing style of "playing the typewriter" and the spontaneity of Action Painting (as epitomized, for example, by the lively poem-paintings he made with Norman Bluhm in 1960), or, more recently, on O'Hara's kinship with the camp and collage of Rauschenberg and Johns.⁶ In Schuyler's case, the attention has usually fallen on Fairfield Porter, whom Schuyler freely admitted was his favorite painter, and whose soft-focus realism—a realism which presents "an aspect of everyday life, seen neither as a snapshot nor as an exaltation" (Schuyler, *Selected Art Writings*, 16)—makes for a quick corollary to Schuyler's own role as a scribe of days. These parallels are useful and necessary, and I see no need to displace them; my goal here is to add Mitchell's presence to the conversation.

In a sense, Mitchell's career stands apart from the oft-repeated art history narrative that charts the move from the high "metaphysical heat" of the first generation of abstract expressionists to the "blague" of Johns and Rauschenberg to the cool vacancy of Pop, minimalism, and conceptualism(s). Her rage and vigor also set her apart from the quiet realists associated with the New York School, such as Porter, Freilicher, John Button, and so on. Kertess succinctly describes Mitchell's alienation from the critical terms set forth by Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg, the two theorists famous for championing (and perhaps delimiting) New York School aesthetics as follows: "Mitchell made no effort to secure a place in either one of these camps. . . . Greenberg's [formalist] theories

seemed to foreclose the possibility of a congruence of painting, nature, and consciousness that she was seeking. Nor could her paint, step back, paint, step back, deliberations qualify her for the ranks of Rosenberg's macho warriors armed with gesture" (20). (Kertess explains elsewhere that Mitchell's "step back, paint, step back, paint" method was "in part necessitated by Mitchell's farsightedness, present since childhood" [18].) Like Stein, Mitchell was known for an unremitting dedication to her art—once Mitchell discovered abstract painting in the late 1940s, she never went back, not even to flirt with figuration. As Rosset once said, "There was no stopping it . . . In a society that didn't allow abstract painting she would have gone to jail" (Benstock, 19). What's more, Mitchell's characterization of her painting method—"Call it . . . whatever you want. I paint with oil on canvas—without an easel. I do not condense things. I try to eliminate clichés, extraneous material. I try to make it exact"—would remain accurate throughout her long career (*Theories*, 33).

There are, in fact, several intriguing parallels between Mitchell and Stein. Both pursued their work with an unrelenting largesse and little to no concern for artistic trends, and both were deeply interested in the overlaps between visual and verbal arts. And while both were known as quintessentially "American" artists, each relocated to France in early adulthood and essentially never came home. Both worked big: Stein on interminable projects such as writing "everybody's autobiography," Mitchell on huge canvases hung vertically—two examples of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick might call "fat art," and which stand as challenges to the assumption that a voracious desire to cover space—to "think big"—is an inherently virile impulse. There are also more subtle connections between them, one of which gets triggered by Mitchell's above insistence, "I try to be exact." "Exact" was one of Stein's favorite words, as dramatized at length in her "Completed Portrait of Picasso": "exact resemblance to exact resemblance, the exact resemblance as exact as a resemblance," etc. In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein boils down her own artistic temperament as

follows: "Gertrude Stein, in her work, has always been possessed by the intellectual passion for exactitude in the description of inner and outer reality. . . . She has produced a simplification by this concentration, and as a result the destruction of associational emotion in poetry and prose. . . . [Poetry or prose] should consist of an exact reproduction of either an outer or an inner reality" (211). Stein's distaste for emotion as a source of art making certainly separates her from Mitchell, who repeatedly described her paintings as "remembered landscapes which involve my feelings" (Benstock, 31)—a phrase which recalls O'Hara's "In Memory of My Feelings" (a poem O'Hara dedicated to painter Grace Hartigan, with whom O'Hara also collaborated). Upon scrutiny, however, Mitchell's approach to the relationship between "inner" and "outer" reality (or "feelings" and "landscape") is quite subtle, methodical, and even scientific. As Ashbery once quoted her as saying: "I'm trying for something more specific than movies of my everyday life: to define a feeling" (*Reported Sightings*, 101). Stein and Mitchell both remained deeply committed to nonrepresentational investigation, but unlike so many of their comrades, they did not conduct their investigations in service of the mythic, the transcendent, the sublime, or even the unconscious. Rather, both were interested in charting the fact of feeling, and its relation to "outer reality," exactly.

Unlike Stein, however, who explicitly envisioned modernist experiment (hers and Picasso's, primarily) as necessarily destructive of that which had come before (i.e., the entire nineteenth century, the mimetic direction of Western art since the Renaissance, etc.), and unlike many of her fellow New York School painters, Mitchell did not invest much in the avant-garde fetishes of innovation or knocking down one's predecessors. "Lots of painters are obsessed with inventing something," Mitchell explained. "When I was young, it never occurred to me to invent. All I wanted to do was paint" (*Theories*, 34). Consequently, Mitchell was not enthralled by the work of Picasso or the surrealists. Her list of favorite painters included Matisse, Van Gogh, and Monet—hardly the usual roster of influences for

an abstract expressionist associated with “the greatest painting adventure of our time,” as Motherwell famously termed it. In fact, Mitchell’s move to France in 1959 (a move which parallels Ashbery’s, who lived in Paris from 1958 to 1965, as well as, much later, Alice Notley’s) removed Mitchell from the heyday of New York School painting at a critical juncture, and served instead to align her with the very “School of Paris” that others slightly before her had worked to “overthrow.” I don’t want to make too much of these moves—people relocate, after all, for all kinds of reasons—but Mitchell’s move gains in significance when linked to broader cultural currents, some of which have to do with gender and sexuality. As Michael Leja argues in a chapter entitled “Narcissus in Chaos,” during the postwar period, abstract expressionism’s “aura of masculinity” and obsession with originality together served as “a crucial component of cold war U.S. national identity, differentiating the nation politically and culturally from a Europe portrayed as weakened and effeminate” (256). Seen in this light, a withdrawal from the New York scene at this time and a relocation to Europe (Mitchell in fact ended up living on the same property as Monet had in Vétheuil) cannot help but appear as an abstention from, if not an aversion to, this differentiation.

While many of Mitchell’s paintings bespeak a tremendous urgency—indeed a violence—they don’t necessarily feel reactionary or iconoclastic. As Ashbery wrote in a 1965 review of her work, “There are new forms, new images in this work, but no more than were needed at a given moment... these unelaborated planes happened to suit Joan Mitchell only once or twice, after which she discarded them, for the time being at least” (*Reported Sightings*, 99–100). While it may be justly impossible to hammer out the specifics of a relationship between Mitchell’s gender and her skepticism about innovation, I still think it possible that one exists. A commitment to innovation qua innovation presupposes an investment in lineage—a feeling, perhaps teleological at its core, that one’s work will somehow *matter* in the scheme of things, that it will have a significant part to play in the

course of art or literary history. Though there are certainly women who have had this feeling (Stein, for one)—and certainly many men who have not—it isn't one that can be divorced from the historical fact of women's presumed irrelevance to these histories.⁷

This fact becomes particularly acute within abstract expressionist rhetoric, which, as Leja has pointed out, worked together with "a broad range of cultural productions from this time . . . popular psychology, film noir, cultural criticism, and popular philosophy" to construct a discourse he calls "Modern Man discourse," from which women were structurally excluded (258). Mitchell's negotiation of subjectivity and landscape did not necessarily form in reaction to this discourse, but it nonetheless stands apart from the dominant abstract expressionist trend of replacing the tradition of female-as-subject-matter (specifically, the female nude) with a journey toward a feminized "other within," which could then stand for "primarily the unconscious, primitive instincts and residues, vague irresistible forces, or all of these" (Leja, 258)—a good example of which might be Pollock's 1953 painting in Duco allegorically titled *The Deep*, which hovers between the abstract and the vaginal.

In contrast, Mitchell describes her work as follows: "My painting is not an allegory or a story. It is more like a poem" (*Theories*, 33). Though Mitchell uses a simile here, when considering her "field composition" paintings from the 1970s, one might be inclined to take her comment more literally. As a critic once remarked about her haunting triptych, *Clearing* (1973), the panels seem to communicate three "self-contained episodes—or, better, interrelated stanzas" (Livingston, 35). "Stanza" is an Italian word meaning "an apartment, chamber, or room," which traces back to the Latin verb *stāre*, "to stand." As its etymology indicates, "stanza" signifies a stopping place, a place to stand, a space for a "stance," i.e., for an idea or conviction. Many of Mitchell's paintings from this period are polyptychs—such as the overwhelming *Wet Orange* (1972), or the exquisitely muted *Field for*

Skyles (1973)—each of whose panels represents a stanza, a “room for an idea.” (“I want to paint the feeling of a space,” Mitchell said [*Theories*, 34]). Further, *within* each of these panels, Mitchell often paints a variety of rectangular blocks clearly reminiscent of stanzas on a page of poetry. Her polyptychs are thus doubly stanzaic, in that they echo the part of poetry that has to do with holding or vacating space—of intimating the places in a form where words might appear (as in the generalized outline of a sonnet or sestina), but, in this case, have not.

Paintings such as *Field for Skyles* may bring to mind what Charles Olson termed “composition by field” in his influential “Projective Verse” manifesto of 1950. But Mitchell’s practice diverges from the scenario envisioned by Olson’s manifesto—which remains fixated on the white page and the performance of the authorial body composing upon it (“Action Painting” by typewriter)—in several interesting ways. For her interest in “fields” never elides those of nature—i.e., the actual green fields that a dog might play in, as her title suggests. Thus the fascination of *Field for Skyles* lies in its ability to invoke green fields of nature *and* fields of textual or stanzaic composition, while also calling attention to its status as a material art object via its immense size and the autonomous wonder of its pigments. Mitchell always insisted she was “a visual painter”—i.e., hostile to linguistic explication, and averse to issuing “pithy statements about her work,” as Bill Berkson put it in a short essay on the gallery card for Mitchell’s 2002 *Working with Poets* show at the Tibor de Nagy. It is more customary to talk of, say, Cy Twombly as a “literary” painter, due to his many poetic allusions and his scribbling on the canvas—scribbling which borders on, develops into, or wipes out actual script. But Mitchell’s painting incorporates her interest in writing just as fiercely as Twombly’s, albeit in a different way—one which has less to do with *language* and the authorial hand, and more to do with *poetry*, or poetry as form.

Indeed, her polyptychs address two fundamental compositional questions in poetry: “how does this look next to this?” and “should this stay or

should this go?" Side-by-side comparisons were key to Mitchell's process, especially as she did not compose the panels of her polyptychs together, but rather worked on them each separately, then decided on their sequence after the fact. (Her studio at this time could apparently fit only two panels next to each other at one time, so she had to move them around quite a bit—see Livingston, 64.) Mitchell does not unite her polyptychs, as do many other painters, with brushstrokes that bleed from one panel onto the next; consequently, her panels retain a sense of isolation within their unity. And although I once overheard a docent at the Whitney instructing her group to consider the end pieces of Mitchell's quadriptych *La Vie en rose* as prologue and coda to the central action, personally I have found that Mitchell's large works repel a narrative tact—or in this case, as the central panels of *La Vie en rose* chronicle a heart-wrenching degeneration into embers—a kind of extinguishing, or vanquishing, of the choppy black strokes—it must be said that if Mitchell is telling a story, she means to emphasize the hollowness at its center. Mitchell often arranged her work in sequence, but she did so with the goal of creating an overall effect, ideally taken in all at once from a distance, not read left to right. (Mitchell hung long-distance mirrors in her studio for this reason.) Given the New York School obsession with spontaneity (an obsession shared by the Beats, the Black Mountain writers, and many others at midcentury) it makes sense that poets such as O'Hara would deeply envy this "all-at-onceness," i.e., painting's failure to unfold sequentially. And it was precisely this element of painting that enraptured Mitchell, who loved the idea that "painting never ends, it is the only thing in the world which is both continuous and still" (*Theories*, 32). In this sense, Mitchell's endless, stanzaic paintings may best represent the dream of a poetry in which form is truly content.

In addition to negotiating these "stanzas," many of Mitchell's paintings also negotiate a dialectic between white space (or white paint, as is often the case) and intense clots of color (as in *Girolata Triptych*, 1964). As with all of Mitchell's colors, however, "white" is never a stagnant entity, but rather always on the cusp of shifting into the palest of yellows, grays, blues, etc.

The phenomenon of color—the materiality of pigment, and its transcendent emanations—presents us with yet another sort of true abstraction, in that color somehow brokers out—indeed, is somehow paradigmatic of—the mysterious relationship between subjective and objective reality. As Wittgenstein summarizes the paradox: “An object must occur, if it occurs at all, in a certain coloured state of affairs, though in itself it is, so to speak, colourless.” And Mitchell’s paintings are justly famous for being “colored states of affairs.” To stand in front of paintings from the 1970s such as *Blue Territory*, *Salut Sally*, or *Mooring* is almost to hear Mitchell say: *Here are the most beautiful colors in the world, no holds barred. Enjoy.* The paintings are not exactly spontaneous outpourings—Mitchell was known for planning each brush stroke—but in her chromophilia, she holds nothing back. Her use of color is shockingly generous, to the point of extravagance. By all accounts, Mitchell was enthralled by the rush of glorious pigment, and while she had the money to buy high-quality paint, she tended to privilege instant color gratification over longevity. As a friend once explained, “She was focused on *color*, not the durability. . . . She used a lot of turpentine, repeatedly thinning and rethinning her paints, which would sometimes sit in her studio (usually in large dog food cans), often unlidded, for months, and even years, waiting to be reconstituted when the need arose” (Livingston, 26).

Mitchell’s unrestrained chromophilia plays an undeniably large part in the visual pleasure of her work. This pleasure, however, has also engendered a certain amount of critical wavering. Near the beginning of his July 5, 2002, *New York Times* review of Mitchell’s Whitney retrospective, Michael Kimmelman writes: “The impact of her works, especially the later ones (she died of lung cancer ten years ago, at sixty-six), is so immediately intoxicating that a natural reaction is to distrust the art. Paintings this suave and sure-footed must be glib and manipulative, you may be excused for telling yourself” (31). Though the next paragraph advises the reader to “[d]istrust your distrust,” the suspicion with which he opens his review

interests me, especially as it recurs in many reviews of Mitchell's work. On the one hand, a patent distrust of beauty can be read as a modernist tic, and the urge to judge it as "glib and manipulative" perhaps a postmodernist extension of the same. (Not to be myopic, I should note that a distrust of beauty—especially when aligned with the feminine—goes back a long way. At least to Eve in Eden, probably earlier.) On the other, in Mitchell's case, I wonder if it also has something to do with the tacit relation between chromophobia and gender. As Mitchell (and Helen Frankenthaler) well knew, being labeled "a colorist" is about as feminized a designation as art history has to offer. While the robustness and enormity of Mitchell's paintings disallows a dismissal of them as "decorative," her paintings remain peculiar in the abstract expressionist pantheon for their furious insistence on over-the-top visual pleasure. This insistence may partially explain why Mitchell never found a Greenberg or a Rosenberg to champion her work in writing: its commitment to pleasure, and specifically to the pleasures of a "theater of color," as Ashbery once described her work, has produced a sort of force field around it, and a certain imperviousness to words.

The entire body of Barbara Guest's poetic work could also be justly called a "theater of color." In fact, Guest's ongoing commitment to potential fluidity of poetic form and the mysteries of color-in-language constitutes perhaps the strongest testament of all the New York School poets to Schuyler's oft-quoted statement (from Allen's *New American Poetry*) that "New York poets, except I suppose the color blind, are affected most by the floods of paint in whose crashing surf we all scramble" (418). Guest's poems explore color as relentlessly as do Schuyler's, but in a different way: she doesn't fumble to describe the colors of the world accurately as much as she creates a synesthetic universe in which it makes sense to say, "Sometimes this mustard feeling / clutches me also" ("A Reason") or "he felt a little blue tinge in his arm" ("Green Awnings") (*Selected Poems*, 34, 21). In her poem "The Screen of Distance," Guest writes: "I / created a planned randomness in which color / behaved like a star" (*Poems*, 132); such a line

could easily serve as a sort of artist's statement for Guest's work at large. A stanza from an early Guest poem, "On the Way to Dumbarton Oaks," provides a good example of the kind of movement between concrete and abstract color that Guest's poetry often charts:

Chinese tree

your black branches and your three yellow leaves
with you I traffick. My three
yellow notes, my three yellow stanzas,
my three precisenesses
of head and body and tail joined
carrying my scroll, my tree drawing (Selected Poems, 15)

The lines begin with attention to landscape, then quickly move into the realm of "yellow stanzas"—a near-exact rendition of Mitchell's process. In both cases, the goal isn't to represent the tree's yellow leaves, but rather to "traffick" with them. The effect of this trafficking is odd, for Guest's continual naming of colors eventually creates a universe that often feels colorless, or at least one in which color hovers between sensation and idea, never quite landing in either place. Like Mitchell and Schuyler, Guest couldn't really care less about being saddled with the feminized or queer designation of "colorist." As her poem "The Poetess" makes clear, Guest embraces the roles of both "poetess" and "colorist" alike (though not without some irony): "coriander darks thimble blues / red okays adorn her / buzz green circles in flight / or submergence?" (78). In a critical piece titled "The Color Green in the Art Work of Richard Turtle," Guest observes that "[c]olor initiates form" (*Dürer*, 16); something of the same could certainly be said of Guest's work, whose increasingly atmospheric, "spaced-out" quality has much in common with the bled-out, meditative color stains of Helen Frankenthaler's painting, who was renowned for her "abstract practice" of "drawing with color."

The four poems of Guest's that appeared in Allen's 1960 *New American Poetry* anthology may have borne many similarities to those of her New York School comrades also appearing there (Schuyler, Edward Field, Koch, O'Hara, and Ashbery), but her repeated mantra "I go separately" from one of her included poems ("Santa Fe Trail") announced—perhaps inadvertently—her difference, or her difference to come. Though Guest and O'Hara were good friends, and though their work most certainly overlaps—specifically in their adaptation of a surrealist sensibility to an American idiom—in a sense Guest's unironic investment in aesthetic theory and philosophy couldn't stand further apart from O'Hara's "There's nothing metaphysical about it" attitude as performed in "Personism." And while Ashbery certainly gets metaphysical, none of the New York School men really holds a candle to the degree of abstraction of Guest's writing, which approaches (and even occasionally surpasses) Mallarmé in its commitment to lyrical opacity. As Guest said in a 1986 talk appropriately titled "Mysteriously Defining the Mysterious": "In whatever guise reality becomes visible, the poet withdraws from it into invisibility" (Gevirtz, n.p.).

Even Ashbery's famed evasiveness (i.e., his writing "as though to protect / What it advertises," as he wrote of Parmigianino's hand in "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror") doesn't court the same withdrawal Guest is talking about here—a withdrawal which is more mystical, more platonic, and, perhaps, more hopeful about lyric poetry's capacity to contain, veil, and act as guardian to wonder. Read a Guest poem once, quickly, and you might feel as though nothing happened; in fact, you may feel as though you missed it altogether. (Here is a whole page, for example, from *Rocks on a Platter*, with the white space condensed: "Wet earth disinters itself. / With aplomb / bestows / 'The Kiss Behind the Counter'" [9]). Ashbery also plays with this sense of fleetingness—as he explains on the opening page of *Flow Chart*: "It seems I was reading something; / I have forgotten the sense of it or what the small / role of the central poem made me want

to feel. No matter." But where Ashbery's "not caring" allows—indeed encourages—a kind of amnesia ("No matter"), the carefully scored quality of Guest's work suggests something quite different: that to hear it we must listen very closely, as if listening to something that isn't entirely sure it wants to be heard, more like a Morton Feldman composition. And whereas Ashbery and Guest have each had blessedly long and productive careers, Ashbery's voluminous poetic output has often plastered the radar screen, visually as well as critically, while Guest's poetry, especially her later work—gives off the feeling of quiet but steady beeps flickering across the screen, then returning to the void from whence they came. This feeling has increased over the past forty-odd years, up until Guest's death in 2006. Guest published voluminously—twenty-one volumes of poetry since 1960—but with an ever-increasing commitment to a firm and mystical minimalism. (Her 2002 book, aptly titled *Miniatures*, uses the following epigram from Chekhov: "I, too, am an ardent defender of Miniature Pieces.") If there is a "fatness" in Guest's art, it has less to do with rage or voraciousness and more to do with this strange and steady output, and with her use of the page as an open compositional field, a practice which markedly increased over her career.

Robert Kaufman has suggested that Guest's work evokes the problem of "hearing lyric at all in our culture; and of hearing a specifically difficult lyric whose seeming abstractness or hyper-distillation may appear willfully recondite" (12). (It's tempting, and perhaps somewhat accurate, to charge the hyperstimulation of contemporary culture with creating and abetting this difficulty, but it may help to remember that back in the 1890s, Mallarmé was addressing himself to the same issue, and offered the following reminder: "I become obscure, of course! if one makes a mistake and thinks one is opening a newspaper."⁸) Kaufman's above use of the word "distillation" offers a good inroad into Guest's particular kind of "abstract practice." The common slippage in abstract expressionist rhetoric from "abstract" to "nonobjective," "nonfigurative,"

or “nonrepresentational” doesn’t really make sense in relation to Guest, whose poetry is quite concerned with objects. (The title of her first book is, in fact, *The Location of Things* [1960].) Guest’s abstract practice leads us back to the root of the word “abstract” itself, which derives from the Latin *abs* (off, away) + *tractus* (past participle of “to draw”)—thus, “to abstract” means “to draw away.” It is this etymology that lends the word its scientific usage—in chemistry, “abstraction” is used synonymously with “distillation.” While my discussion of Mitchell focused on how her painting complicates the definition of “abstract” as meaning “to consider apart from material embodiment, or from particular instances,” here I want to consider how Guest’s poetic practice locates itself at the literal heart of the verb “to abstract,” which has withdrawal, removal, and distillation as its core gestures. “In whatever guise reality becomes visible, the poet withdraws from it into invisibility.”

In *Other Traditions*, Ashbery poses the question of whether there is “something inherently stimulating in the poetry called ‘minor,’ something that it can do for us when major poetry can merely wring its hands” (6). It’s possible that Guest’s work finds its home—indeed, its freedom—in such a place. As Kaufman has observed, “[Guest’s] work, judged, for example, in terms of the language poetry or mainstream lyric which it is not—does not behave according to any current canons” (12). Curiously, it is also true that compared to the men of the New York School, Guest’s work is by far the most explicitly involved with “canonical” writers and issues. Whereas Schuyler, O’Hara, and Ashbery all cultivate the camp pleasure of eschewing the major and privileging the minor, Guest’s work converses throughout with heavy hitters, reaching a sort of peak in 1999’s *Rocks on a Platter: Notes on Literature*, each of whose four sections begins with an epigraph from a notable male: I. Hölderlin (“To live is to defend a form”); II. Dr. Samuel Johnson (“To invest abstract ideas with form, and animate them with activity has always been the right of poetry”); III. Hegel (“... the empirical inner and outer world is just what is not the world of genuine

reality, but is to be entitled a mere appearance more strictly than is true of art, and a crueller deception"); and IV. Adorno ("The Moment a limit is posited it is overstepped, and that against which the limit was established is absorbed.") As is apparent from these epigraphs—particularly from the Adorno—Guest's experimentation is of a far more skeptical sort than the brash, anti-academic battle cry of Koch's "Fresh Air" (1968). As Lynn Keller summarizes, "Guest's poems don't have the same counter-cultural flair, the in-your-face defiance of social convention that catches us up in the fifties and sixties work of Ginsberg, O'Hara, Duncan, Olson, or even Ashbery" (Keller, 215).

Taken together, these epigraphs from *Rocks on a Platter* also testify to Guest's distrust of "the empirical inner and outer world," which, as Hegel has it, "is just what is not the world of genuine reality, but is to be entitled a mere appearance more strictly than is true of art, and a crueller deception." Coming from Hegel, this prescription sounds quite dire. Guest has considerably more fun with it, as in the opening lines of the poem "The Location of Things":

Why from this window am I watching leaves?
Why do halls and steps seem narrower?
Why at this desk am I listening for the sound of the fall
of color, the pitch of the wooden floor
and feet going faster? Am I to understand change, whether
remarkable
or hidden, am I to find a lake under the table
or a mountain beside my chair
and will I know the minute water produces lilies
or a family of mountaineers scales the peaks? (*Poems*, 11)

And thus Guest begins her (published) poetic career with questions—big, unanswerable questions, such as: *Why am I here, and not somewhere else? Do*

objects change, or only our perception of them? Does color make sound, i.e., can there be true fluidity between distinct sense-perceptions? Is the marvelous right around the corner, indeed right under the table? How can any of us presume to know what will happen next? Are all material events somehow interrelated? If so, how attuned am I as an instrument to perceive their correspondence; how attuned can (my) poetry be? These are not necessarily depressing questions, and Guest is not melodramatic about them. Still, Hegel's notion of the perceivable world as a cruel deception lurks not too far off in the distance. Especially in her early poetry, Guest's surrealist buoyancy ("a lake under the table / or a mountain beside my chair") coexists with a real sense of dread—a dread that comes, perhaps, out of her dual urge "to cement connection while insisting at times alarmingly on the separateness of things," as Geoff Ward has put it (*Jacket* no. 3).

Though Guest often delights in specificity, she doesn't echo O'Hara's jubilant celebration of objects, as in his poem "Today": "Oh! kangaroos, sequins, chocolate sodas! / You really are beautiful! Pearls, / harmonicas, jujubes, aspirin! all the stuff they've always talked about // still makes a poem a surprise! / These things are with us every day / even on beachheads and biers. They / do have meaning. They're strong as rocks" (*Collected Poems*, 15). Instead, for Guest, "solid objects are merciless" (*Rocks*, 16). The poem "The Location of Things" ends with a related, albeit muted species of this dread:

through this floodlit window
or from a pontoon on this theatrical lake,
you demand your old clown's paint and I hand you
from my prompter's arms this shako,
wandering as I am into clouds and air
rushing into darkness as corridors
who do not fear the melancholy of the stair.

The syntax is tricky, but the implication seems to be that the corridors don't fear "the melancholy of the stair," but that the speaker very well may. (Note the similarity of this latter phrase to O'Hara's comment in "Personism" that "the choice between 'the nostalgia for the infinite' and 'the nostalgia of the infinite' defines an attitude towards degree of abstraction. The nostalgia of the infinite representing the greater degree of abstraction, removal, and negative capability [as in Keats and Mallarmé]" [*Collected Poems*, 498].) Standing at the head of Guest's career, the above stanza functions as an odd self-portrait and invitation: she passes off the comical, phallic shako—a "stiff, cyclindrical military dress hat with a metal plate in front, a short visor, and a plume" (*American Heritage Dictionary*, 1125)—she won't be needing *that* on her journey—and then wanders off, not as a hero charging off into the great abyss, but as a drifter—indeed, a drifter amongst the drifting, i.e., "clouds and air."⁹ "Air" only gains in meaning throughout Guest's oeuvre—the title of her 1978 novel, *Seeking Air*, makes use of a phrase from her 1973 poem, "Roses," in *Moscow Mansions*: "there are nervous / people who cannot manufacture / enough air and must seek / for it when they don't have plants, / in pictures. There is the mysterious / traveling that one does outside / the cube and this takes place / in air" (*Selected Poems*, 71). This last line practices a Hegelian inversion: where one might customarily think life is the vast action that takes place apart from, or alongside, art, here life suddenly shrinks to "the mysterious / traveling that one does outside / the cube," and art remains the less cruel deception.

For Guest—as for Mallarmé, and, perhaps, Stevens—poetry is not just a part of reality. It is also a reality unto itself—and a separate, perhaps truer one at that. And here Guest differs in sensibility from some of the Language poets who have learned from her work, for while Guest's writing certainly speaks to Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews's wish for a poetry that "does not involve turning language into a commodity for consumption; instead, it involves repossessing the sign through

close attention to, and active participation in, its production" (*The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book*, x), Guest customarily shuns the communal ramifications of such a project, and insists instead on separateness. As she says in *Fence*, "The poet is always outside society. The moment the poet enters society, strange things happen" (123). And although Guest's work has much in common with that of Lyn Hejinian, Hejinian's deep-felt conviction that "[a] poetics gets formed in and as a relationship to the world," (*Fence* no. 3, 114) chafes a bit against Guest's desire to keep poetry as far as possible from "anything that is going to damage it as it moves along the page."

Clearly there's a puritanical streak here: Guest's poems are experimental compositions, but not in the neo-Dadaist sense celebrated by Duchamp, Cage, and Ashbery, who welcome background noise and garbage into the fabric. An early Guest poem, "Sadness," ends with the lines: "A speck of coal dust floated down and settled on my lapel. / Quickly with your free hand you rubbed out the spot. / Yet do you know I shall carry always / that blemish on my breast?" (*Poems*, 33). The sadness of the title seems to be located right there, in that blemish. Guest doesn't try to rub it away, but it's clear that the world's arbitrary markings are not always easy to celebrate. The blemish evokes *The Scarlet Letter*: like Hester's "A," the blemish is actually on the speaker's lapel, not on her body; nonetheless, she will always carry it. But while Hester is tortured, Guest is quietly bemused by the disjunct. In fact this scene in "Sadness" may have more in common with the bemused opening lines of the George Oppen poem "Myself I Sing," in which Oppen inverts Whitmanic boast to showcase existential uncertainty: "Me! he says, hand on his chest. / Actually, his shirt. / And there, perhaps, / The question" (35). Guest is nowhere averse to accident, but her acceptance of it coexists with a drive toward an ideal of purity more surrealist than Dada or New York School in spirit. As with Breton, chance for Guest is exalted, but also somehow overdetermined. As Guest explains in her statement in *Fence*, "[The poem] goes from place to place trying to find an identity. It goes anywhere it wants to go. . . . A

poem will find its own subject . . . I think that it is 'the beautiful voyage'" (124).¹⁰

It seems that for Guest, William James's definition of reality as "that which we habitually choose to pay attention to" does not go quite far enough. She would prefer to propel the problem beyond the bounds of the subject/object dyad, as evidenced by the title of her poem "An Emphasis Falls on Reality," in which the perceiver has apparently vacated the field. No heroic subjectivity dividing the world into the "me" and the "not-me," here—rather, an emphasis simply falls, like light or rain, unprovoked.¹¹ Eileen Myles once remarked that Ashbery could be considered the theorist of the New York School; based on "An Emphasis Falls on Reality," I could imagine a similar case being made for Guest. Here are its final stanzas:

The necessary idealizing of you reality
is part of the search, the journey
where two figures embrace

This house was drawn for them
it looks like a real house
perhaps they will move in today

in ephemeral dusk and
move out of that into night
selective night with trees,

The darkened copies of all trees. (*Selected Poems*, 123)

In light of this poem, one might ask: in what ways do O'Hara's "I do this, I do that" poems, and Schuyler's "things as they are" poems idealize reality? In what ways does O'Hara's "Personism," which imagines the poem "at

last between two persons instead of two pages," also angle toward "the journey / where two figures embrace"? The idea of a poem drawing a house for two people to live in has a potentially queer inflection as well: will the domicile remain, like gender itself, "*a kind of imitation for which there is no original*," to use Judith Butler's famous phrase? Indeed, the lovely, final phrase "the darkened copies of all trees" leaves little space for an original. Instead, Guest puts a different spin on platonic form: the trees the poet draws for us are not simply shadows of other, real trees, but nor are they simply multiple derivations of one, original "treeness." The phrase "all trees" echoes the title of Ashbery's first book, *Some Trees* (1956), but with a difference: while "some trees" reflects Ashbery's aversion to absolute gestures, Guest's "all trees" reflects her drive toward mystification. The deft doublings in Guest's final lines—"night / selective night," "trees / the darkened copies of all trees"—postulate a universe in which the relation between the particular and the universal is denser, more mysterious, more prolific, and more playful than that found in Plato's cave.

In an essay comparing Guest with Mallarmé, Rachel DuPlessis notes that while the subject of *Un Coup de Dés* is "absence, struggle, the void, shipwreck, and the intangible," Guest's work—specifically, her 1996 book *Quill, Solitary, APPARITION*—centers on "presence, pleasure, adequacy, buoyancy—and the intangible" (212). Part of what constitutes this difference is Guest's understated feminist consciousness, which generally stands in the shadows but from the start of her career onwards occasionally stepped out to mock—however faintly—the kind of access to the transcendent or intangible traditionally offered to women (i.e., mediated through a male figure). If one takes the "my love" in the early poem "Parachutes, My Love, Could Carry Us Higher" (1960) as a male addressee—and it seems fairly certain that the poem is toying with conventions of heterosexual romance—the opening lines of the poem take on a particular resonance: "I just said I didn't know / And now you

are holding me / In your arms, / How kind. / Parachutes, my love, could carry us higher" (*Selected Poems*, 16). For a poet known for her tact and civility, "how kind" pushes as close to sarcasm as Guest gets; it would seem as though this patronizing protector is pushing her quite close to the brink. In fact the speaker is irritated from the get-go—I just said I didn't know, and now look. Plus, later on she has to repeat herself: "Now the suspension, you say, / Is exquisite. I do not know." Elsewhere Guest privileges a state of suspension, but here it's clear that this version of such is not going to do the trick. For the time being, apparently, a man's kind arms will only be an impediment to the kind of transcendence she imagines in a poem such as "The Open Skies": "Noiseless hour / span of float and flight // Sky without lever or stress (. . .) Tough the cone to shelter / Ecstatic harking to upward dome," and so on (*Poems*, 82; see also Keller, 217–8).

Though I would hate to tether Guest down from this "ecstatic harking," by means of conclusion I would like to consider this aspect of Guest's work in relation to "a discourse, which is fully and historically specific, in which transcendence is not a way of being that women seize for themselves but something handed to them with all the weight of male sexual fantasy and demand," as Jacqueline Rose has put it (149–50). In her book on Plath, Rose identifies this discourse as one of the principal problems running through Plath's work, and reads Plath's multitude of rising, burning, and otherwise self-immolating female figures as returning us again and again to the problem of "the very form in which (female) transcendence can be thought" (149). While the introduction of Plath may seem incongruous here, her "haunting" may also suggest that her so-called confessional poetry and the more abstract, ekphrastic idiom associated with Guest are not necessarily as far apart as they may initially seem. Though we save a lot of time and trouble by simply admitting that Guest and Plath come from different poetic climates and have divergent poetic projects, I've also found it worthwhile to consider their work together. The opening lines

of Guest's novel *Seeking Air*, for example, seem to me quite engaged with what Foucault has called "the imperative to confess," though the speaker defines herself by withdrawing from it: "Begin with telling her everything, she had said. This provoked me into wanting to say less and less. Yet there was such a marvelous, such an extraordinary circumference around what I might or might not tell." The speaker then meditates on this circumference "into the reaches of the night" (7).

This opening also bears a relation to the famous lines from Ashbery's "The New Spirit": "I thought that if I could put it all down, that would be one way. And next the thought came to me that to leave all out would be another, and truer way." At first one might be tempted to cast Plath on the confessional, "put it all in" side, and Guest on the anticonfessional, "leave it all out" side, but Plath's form is incredibly lean and chiseled—certainly as deliberately scored as Guest's, though in a different idiom, and Guest's voluminous production of "willfully recondite" distillations presents a compelling paradox. In her essay "Reading Barbara Guest: The View from the Nineties," Linda Kinnihan usefully unearths a 1962 review in which William Dickey disdains Guest's work as reflecting "a self . . . curiously without coherence," and applauds Plath, on the other hand, for her "consistent, personal tone of voice" (Kinnihan, 233). Clearly Plath's form of address is more "blood-hot and personal," but thematically speaking, the idea of "a self curiously without coherence" obsesses both poets. Everywhere in Plath's work first-person speakers are dissolving: "I break up in pieces that fly about like clubs," ("Elm"); "all night / I have been flickering, off, on, off, on," ("Fever 103°"); "And now I / Foam to wheat, a glitter of seas," ("Ariel"); "I am your valuable, The pure gold baby // That melts to a shriek. I turn and burn" ("Lady Lazarus"); "I am breaking apart like the world" ("Three Women"); and so on. Far from postulating a coherent identity, Plath's poetry—particularly the later poetry—devotes itself to the endless chronicle of "selves dissolving, old whore petticoats" ("Fever 103°").

For Plath, this dissolution is both desirable and traumatic, and its pain seemingly stems from the fact that it remains tethered to a speaker who can testify the experience of it. Guest's relationship to such dissolution is less tormented and more elliptical, as in these lines from "Sunday Evening" (1960): "I am talking to you / with what is left of me written off, / On the cuff, ancestral and vague, / As a monkey walks through the many fires / Of the jungle while a village breathes in its sleep" (*Poems*, 26). Somewhat typically for Guest (as for Ashbery), the lines begin with a first-person speaker addressing the reader, but with each line that follows, that speaker leads us further and further away from the self that began, so that by the time the sentence draws to a close, we are out in the jungle with no hand to hold. For Guest this dissolution is desirable, if sometimes melancholic; at times it is the deliverer of ecstasy. As Gevirtz has said of Guest's work, "the body by itself is ecstatic, flying to pieces, marvelous in its occupation of the place no story can fully enter" (*Jacket* no. 10). Yet as the similarity between Gevirtz's phrase "flying to pieces" and Plath's "I break up in pieces that fly about like clubs" suggests, the interest in transcendence shared by Plath and Guest at midcentury draws them toward uncannily related imagery. (Compare, for example, Plath's famous combustion in "Lady Lazarus"—"Ash, ash—You poke and stir"—to Guest's "Ash and ember / creature and skin // Soft body of unprotected guilt" in "The Open Skies.") Again, Guest's ascents are often rapturous affairs—"Ecstatic harking to upward dome"—while Plath's tend toward the pissed-off and gory (as in "Lady Lazarus," which ends with the revenge of the incinerated spirit: "Out of the ash / I rise with my red hair / And I eat men like air"). Given such divergences, it's easy to see why people have felt the need to take sides—to many Plath fans, Guest's ascent into "float and flight" seems hopelessly "ancestral and vague"; to many Guest fans, Plath can seem mired in loathsome sexual scenarios that some feel we'd be better off without.

Much feminist criticism of Plath throughout the 1970s and '80s was in fact fierce in this latter sentiment. As Jane Marcus said of Plath in her 1988

book *Art and Anger: Reading Like a Woman*: "May her nets and hooks soon be in a mausoleum of memory of what a dependent woman's pain and anger looked like, and Plath's name on its wall as its best recorder" (65). Though Marcus is herself a feminist, one can hear in her remark an echo of Elaine de Kooning's earlier distaste for Linda Nochlin's feminist inquiry—an impatience with an emphasis on dependence or difference as opposed to an empowered assumption of equality. De Kooning is in fact quite extreme in this view, and extends it beyond the bounds of the "woman question." As she writes in her response to Nochlin: "To be put in any category not defined by one's work is to be falsified. We're artists who happen to be women or men among other things we happen to be—tall, short, blonde, dark, mesomorph, ectomorph, black, Spanish, German, Irish, hot-tempered, easy-going—that are in no way relevant to our being artists. . . . There are no obstacles in the way of a woman becoming a painter or sculptor, other than the usual obstacles that any artist has to face" (Hesse, 57). *Stop complaining and just do it* seems to be the message—or, as Mitchell put it more simply, "Fuck them"—and certainly it has its attractions.

I think, however, that reading Plath and Guest together can keep the need to take sides in abeyance. Guest herself is known for nonpolarizing (if somewhat vague) statements such as, "I think all poetry is confessional"; at the Barnard Conference in 1999, she stated, "I don't think that there's a poem written that isn't experimental, because the poem presents itself on the page to us and has its own way of being. That's the glorious part of what is known as 'the beautiful voyage' that Ulysses made. We don't always know where we're going" (*Fence*, 122). In her essay about the Plath/Guest divide, Kinnihan explains how this "critical division between the expressive (those advocating the accessible voice of female experience) and the experimental (those concerned with the coded play of language)" has "become standard in literary criticism," then makes the following, critical point: "This oppositional division, taken up by and experienced

by women poets, seems sustained by an unfortunate resistance to examining its contradictory connections to male-derived discourses already set up, in the late fifties and early sixties" (234, 236). This point is especially important, as it wrenches our attention away from symptom and back to cause, and thus back to the questioning of the gendered underpinnings of the abstract/concrete dyad that began this chapter.¹²

In 1991 the painter Shirley Kaneda observed that "some feminists and postmodernists seemingly cannot get beyond abstract painting's association with modernism and formalism and tend to privilege more conceptual or mimetic forms of representation"; thankfully, there are countless young women artists working today who do not labor under such a restrictive burden. Likewise, when considering the question here posed by painter/feminist critic Mira Schor (sister to Naomi), "does feminist practice, in art, teaching, and critical writing, always have in some sense to be representational?" the answer seems increasingly to be no—or at least not with "representational" considered in any simple sense.¹³ Part of the thrill of paying attention to feminist art and literature is watching younger generations of women (and sometimes men) collage, steal from, worship, denigrate, or simply ignore the diversity of practices that have come before them, be they abstract, representational, gestural, conceptual, formalist, prefeminist, protofeminist, postfeminist, antifeminist, all or none of the above. But just as I don't want to seal Plath's name off in a "mausoleum of memory," I'm not quite ready to leave behind the trove of intrigue and difficulty produced by the mere coupling of the words "women and abstraction," and I hope this piece has at least pointed toward the liveliness of the subject.

After all, as recently as March 10, 2006, Jerry Saltz began a *Village Voice* review of German abstract painter Charline Von Heyl as follows:

Given that for every five solo shows of a living artist in a New York gallery only one is by a woman, and that only a small percentage of these are by women painters, and an even smaller proportion of those are by women who paint in what could be called an abstract manner, for a woman to be painting in a nonrepresentational, vaguely gestural mode right now is, consciously or not, a political act. If that woman is over 35 it could be called revolutionary. Some would say it's suicidal.

Suicidal or no, over the past few decades, painters such as Louise Fishman, Mary Heilmann, Suzanne McClelland, Susan Rothenberg, Joan Snyder, and Nancy Spero have worked hard at mocking, reclaiming, transforming, eroticizing, politicizing, deforming and expanding the tradition of abstract painting, with younger painters such as Ghada Amer, Cecily Brown, Lucia Dole-Recio, Jutta Koether, Ruth Roor, Amy Sillman, Sue Williams, and countless others following suit.¹⁴

Perversely, however, I think I want to give the last word to Plath, as her poem "Magi" remains one of the most memorable and incisive meditations on the so-called "dangers of abstraction" that I know:

The abstracts hover like dull angels;
Nothing so vulgar as a nose or an eye
Bossing the ethereal blanks of their face-ovals.

Their whiteness bears no relation to laundry,
Snow, chalk or suchlike. They're
The real thing, all right: the Good, the True—

Salutary and pure as boiled water,
Loveless as the multiplication table.
While the child smiles into thin air.

Six months in the world, and she is able
To rock on all fours like a padded hammock.
For her, the heavy notion of Evil

Attending her cot is less than a belly ache,
And love the mother of milk, no theory.
They mistake their star, these papery godfolk.

They want the crib of some lamp-headed Plato.
Let them astound his heart with their merit.
What girl ever flourished in such company? (*Collected Poems*,
148)

Plath wrote this poem in 1960—the same year that Tiber Press published Guest's first book of poems, as well as Ashbery and Mitchell's poetry-silkscreen collaboration; the same year which saw Mitchell's first solo exhibition in Europe; and the same year in which Donald Allen published his *New American Poetry* anthology. It would be a good decade before the women's movement got underway, a movement whose very first move was to trouble the public/private divide that Plath here pictures as the Platonic whiteness of "the abstracts" versus that of laundry and milk. Whether abstraction always need imply the loveless realm of "dull angels" and "papery godfolk"—and whether Plath's final question—"What girl ever flourished in such company?"—need remain a rhetorical one, I leave up to the reader.

Adapted from Women, the New York School, and Other True Abstractions (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007).

NOTES

- 1 See Steiner, *The Colors of Rhetoric*, 183. Most assume Stein didn't mean this as praise; Warhol, on the other hand, was enraptured by exactly that connection and eventually developed the ecstatic mantra: "Sex Is So Abstract" (see Wayne Koestenbaum's *Andy Warhol: A Penguin Life* [New York: Viking, 2001], 182).
- 2 This "broad, slippery, and vague employment" is a pitfall which I have tried to avoid but have undoubtedly fallen into at times throughout this study. Some of the trouble lies in abstract expressionist rhetoric itself, as critics from the period regularly made the leap of treating *abstract* and *transcendent* as synonymous terms—a leap which had more to do with a particular art-historical agenda than with a desire for linguistic exactitude. For a discussion of how one might relate to the term decades after the abstract expressionist moment, see the introduction of Ann Gibson Eden's *Abstract Expressionism: Other Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), in which she explains how and why she aims to consider "abstract art" as "a sign whose meaning is determined by its use" (xxxvii).
- 3 I'm not going to spend much time here arguing that Guest be returned her rightful status as one of the core members of the New York School, mostly because other critics have recently done such a good job elucidating the matter—see the essays by DuPlessis, Keller, Kinnihan, and Lundquist in *Scene of My Selves*, for example. I would reiterate, however, the "scandalousness" DuPlessis notes in her discussion of Guest's "shocking erasure" from the movement "in which she had been a key participant" (190)—an exclusion epitomized for many by her absence from *An Anthology of New York Poets*, edited by Ron Padgett and David Shapiro and published by Random House in 1970, which included only one female poet (a very young Bernadette Mayer) among twenty-six men. Not surprisingly, a parallel phenomenon transpired in the art world around the same time: Henry Geldzahler's 1969 blockbuster show at the Met, "New York Painting and Sculpture 1940–1970," included Helen Frankenthaler as the only female among forty-three male artists.

- 4 The galleries were Cheim and Read ("The Presence of Absence: Selected Paintings 1956–1992"); Lennon, Weinberg ("Petit: Small Paintings, Works on Paper"); Edward Tyler Nahem Fine Art; and Tibor de Nagy ("Working with Poets: Pastels and Paintings").
- 5 The silkscreens, along with Mitchell's collaborations with Schuyler and J. J. Mitchell, were all on view at the Tibor de Nagy in the summer of 2002, in "Working with Poets." The monograph with the foreword by Ashbery is *Joan Mitchell 1992* from the Robert Miller Gallery in New York.
- 6 See Marjorie Perloff's *Frank O'Hara: Poet Among Painters* (New York: George Braziller, 1977; repr. with a new introduction, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), the first edition of which usefully focuses on O'Hara's relationship to action painting, the second edition of which discusses how she missed or underplayed the connection to Johns and Rauschenberg on the first go-round. Lately this purview of O'Hara's collaborations has grown infinitely wider, in large part due to the publication of the twin-titled compendiums *In Memory of My Feelings: Frank O'Hara and American Art*, ed. Russell Ferguson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), and *In Memory of My Feelings: A Selection of Poems*, ed. Bill Berkson (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2006), as well as several museum exhibitions.
- 7 Not to be misleading, there were certainly other female abstract expressionist painters who were invested in innovation, as well as those (like Mitchell) who innovated whether or not they "cared" about doing so. The most oft-cited example of formal innovation among female painters from the period is usually that of Helen Frankenthaler—her experiments with staining the unprimed canvas, as in her "breakthrough" painting from 1952, *Mountains and Sea*, which inaugurated the practice of "stain-gesture." See Sandler's description of the influence of *Mountains and Sea* in *The New York School* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 59–68; see also Lisa Saltzman's essay "Reconsidering the Stain: On Gender, Identity, and New York School Painting" in *Reading Abstract Expressionism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).
- 8 See Charles Rosen, "Mallarmé the Magnificent," *New York Review of Books* 46, no. 9 (May 20, 1999).

- 9 For more on Guest and the heroic, see Lunquist's essay in *The Scene of My Selves*, eds. Terrence Diggory and Stephen Paul Miller (Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 2001), in which she considers the Hartigan/Guest collaborations as commentaries on the "heroic style" of abstract expressionism, as well as forays into new, unexplored forms of female heroism (253–64).
- 10 For more on this concept as it relates to Breton and surrealism, see Rosalind Krauss's essay "No More Play" in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), in which she analyzes the "magisterial example" of the opening of Breton's *L'amour fou*, in which Breton and Giacometti are randomly claimed by "seemingly useless objects" while wandering around a flea market—objects which Krauss later calls "overdetermined" (see 43, 72).
- 11 William James moved this way, too—see his 1904 essay "Does Consciousness Exist?" See also Wittgenstein (*Philosophical Investigations*, no. 501), where he asks: if the purpose of language is to express thoughts, then "what thought is expressed, for example, by the sentence: 'It's raining?'"
- 12 One could also extend Kinnihan's point even further, and into the realm of the debate over the role that universalism should (or shouldn't) play in feminism in general. See Joan Scott's essay "Universalism and the History of Feminism" (in *differences* 7, no. 1 (1995): 2–14), for example, in which she explains, via the history of feminism in France, how the apparent choice between the particular (sexual difference) and the universal (equality)—has not really been a choice at all.
- 13 For the remarks by Kaneda, see "Painting and Its Others: In the Realm of the Feminine (in *Arts Magazine*, Summer 1991, 58–64), in which Kaneda attempts to theorize a "'feminine' painting that disregards the gender of its maker," in an effort to think about abstract painting by women that does not fit into (male, modernist) paradigms; for the remarks by Mira Schor, see *Art Journal* 58, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 23.
- 14 As far as poetry goes, there are too many female poets working in abstract idioms of all kinds to list here, but a few strong, younger poets who first come to mind include Renee Gladman, Matthea Harvey, Christine Hume, Claudia Rankine, Frances Richard, Deborah Richards, Bhanu Kapil Rider,

Lisa Roberston, Juliana Spahr, Karen Weiser, and Elizabeth Willis. See also Mary Margaret Sloan's anthology *Moving Borders* (Jersey City: Talisman, 1998), Rankine and Spahr's *American Women Poets in the Twenty-first Century* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), and the anthology of women poets edited by Rankine and Lisa Sewell forthcoming from Wesleyan University Press.

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SAND AND GRAVEL

Martha Ronk

Let me not be, or being only in the gravel

the brushed sound it makes underfoot

or under that or before the foot hits the ground

in the undoing of stone into gravel, the breaking apart

and then into sand at the shore where I left off.

It was a beautiful day.

The dunes at Sand Mountain in Nevada sing a note of low C.

YOUR WAY OF THINKING

Christopher Kang

I was busy thinking cosmologically, and it made me appreciate life in a very ambivalent sort of way, if you know what I mean. I gave a stranger, full of life-change and anxiety, the middle finger, and it was, instantaneously, a constellation, one could spot it in the sky as a comet passed through it with such approval and compensation. See, the 21st century, let's be honest, left us flummoxed, it's true, but even more I was desperately in love with an idea at the bottom of your back pocket, a nebulous, fabulous little thing with an affinity for vintage comic books, a falsetto voice, vice presidential impersonations. Because the earth, the earth was pantomiming your relative kindness, it was worth staging a parade for, but the streets were too festive with street lights, fancy cars, and a child dressed like a grandfather clock hailing a cab. Your way of thinking, a locomotive, it taught me something, I felt young, full of life, *thank you*. You should know more about me before shaking my hand. For instance, I mistook, just the other day, a planet for a star, a parking meter for a 13th century Spanish king. These misconceptions have their repercussions, and I apologize. For your own good, ignore me, I'll keep busy making the most out of this encounter. Excuse me, as someone is at the door. They are asking for a frontispiece, and I know, thanks to you, exactly what they mean.

CARDBOARD SONNET

Zach Savich

Do the stars look brighter because I am colder?
I am a logistical person. *Egress* is only a term
for a female egret. My urine intuitively smells
like children. I go over this bump pulling away
hoping it's a body. I don't actually need to change
the lightbulb, I can pee in the dark. I put on
some shoes I find on the bridge. I am vomiting wine!
The cardboard orange juice carton dissolves in rain.
There are three positions a body can actually rest in.
There is no part of the body a bullet hasn't pierced.
I do not want to meet someone who thinks
I look interesting because I am writing in a notebook.
I rent a variety of movies. Films. There are seventeen
words you can spell with a calculator, not counting 80085.

KETCHUP SONNET

If I had to choose, how about ketchup? It sits
beside us like the narrative column in that poem
by Coleridge. I eat a burrito of noodles. In dusk's
hash-brown scent. The air foggy but with holes in it so
it's like the night's looking at us through a ski mask.
It was the month of noodles. Kept noodles in
pockets to warm hands etc. Tacked noodle seasoning
packets to the wall in the shape of Caryl Pagel.
Is the moon a pancake or butter covering a pancake?
Is thinking all the books are about me narcissism
or empathy? People always call me Pete. I
can always tell which commercial will be the last.
In contrast, dying, the famous poem said, *Mere light*.
Is that a ribbon of pudding? No, that is a riddon of pubbing!

WHEN WE SAW, WE MARVELED

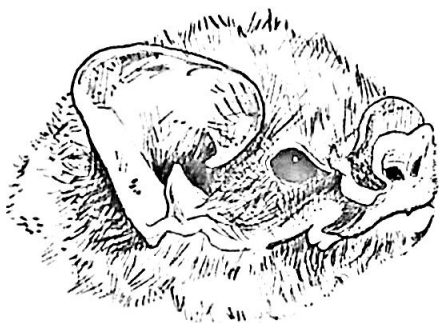
Duffie Taylor

When we saw, we marveled.
The fresh laid egg, we marveled.
The speckled trout, we marveled.
The reaper's grain, we marveled.
The heel, the hip, the toe, we marveled.
The tight squeeze, the loosening edge,
The stacks and stacks of things we took,
We harnessed, we grated, we shaved,
We stacked, (we brought back), we
Begot, we shriveled up, we spat,
We marveled, of course, one to
The other, indistinguishable,
All that.

from THE CHECK-LIST OF THE MAMMALS OF NICARAGUA

Drawings by Amy Jean Porter

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| sac-winged bats | |
| Proboscis Bat | |
| Greater White-lined Bat | |
| Lesser White-lined Bat | |
| Shaggy Bat | |
| <i>Greater Doglike Bat</i> | |
| <i>Lesser Doglike Bat</i> | |
| Chestnut Sac-winged Bat | |
| Gray Sac-winged Bat | |
| Smoky Bat | |
| <i>Northern Ghost Bat</i> | — |
| fisherman bats | |
| Lesser Fishing Bat | |
| Greater Fishing Bat | — |
| mustached, naked-backed bat | |
| Davy's Naked-backed Bat | |
| Big Naked-backed Bat | |



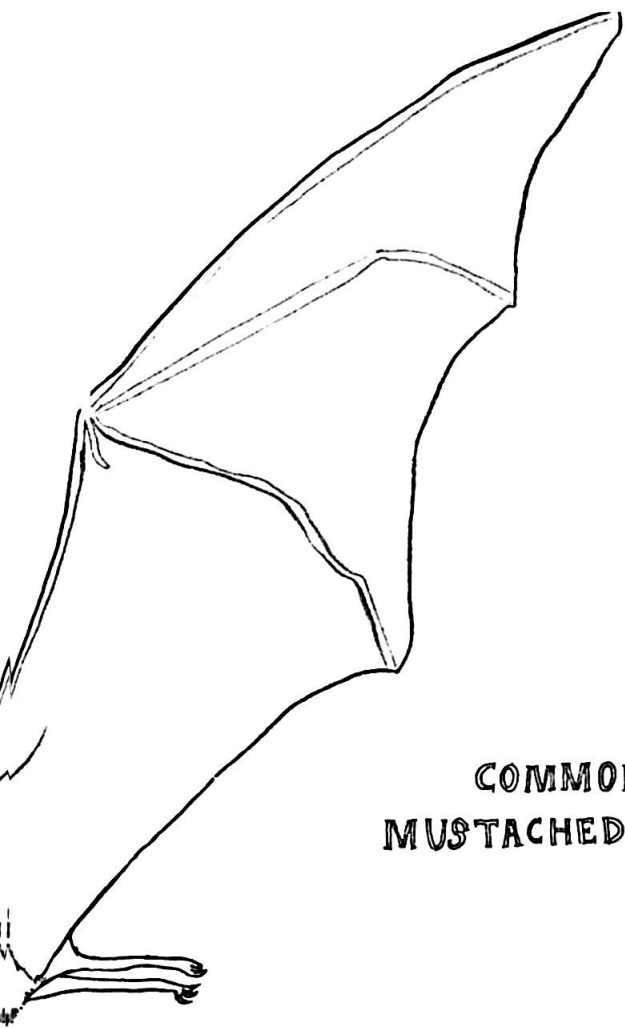
HAIRY-LEGGED
VAMPIRE BAT

Common Mustached Bat
 Lesser Mustached Bat
 —
 american leaf-nosed bat
 Hairy Big-eared Bat
 Common Big-eared Bat
 Tiny Big-eared Bat
 Schmidt's Big-eared Bat
 Orange-throated Bat
 Niceforo's Bat
 Tricolored Bat
 Long-legged Bat
 Pygmy Round-eared Bat
 Striped Hairy-nosed Bat
 Pale Spear-nosed Bat
 Greater Spear-nosed Bat
 Fringe-lipped Bat
 Woolly False Vampire Bat



COMMON TENT-
 MAKING BAT





COMMON
MUSTACHED BAT

Great False Vampire Bat
 Brown Long-tongued Bat
 Gray's Long-tongued Bat
 Common Long-tongued Bat
 Geoffrey's Hairy-legged Bat
 Dark Long-tongued Bat
 Underwoods Long-tongued Bat
 Godman's Whiskered Bat
 Orange Nectar Bat
 Silky Short-tailed Bat
 Chestnut Short-tailed Bat
 Seba's Short-tailed Bat
 Gray Short-tailed Bat
 Little Yellow-shouldered Bat
 Highland Yellow-shouldered Bat
 Jamaican Fruit-eating Bat
 Honduran Fruit-eating Bat
 Intermediate Fruit-eating bat



NORTHERN
 GHOST BAT

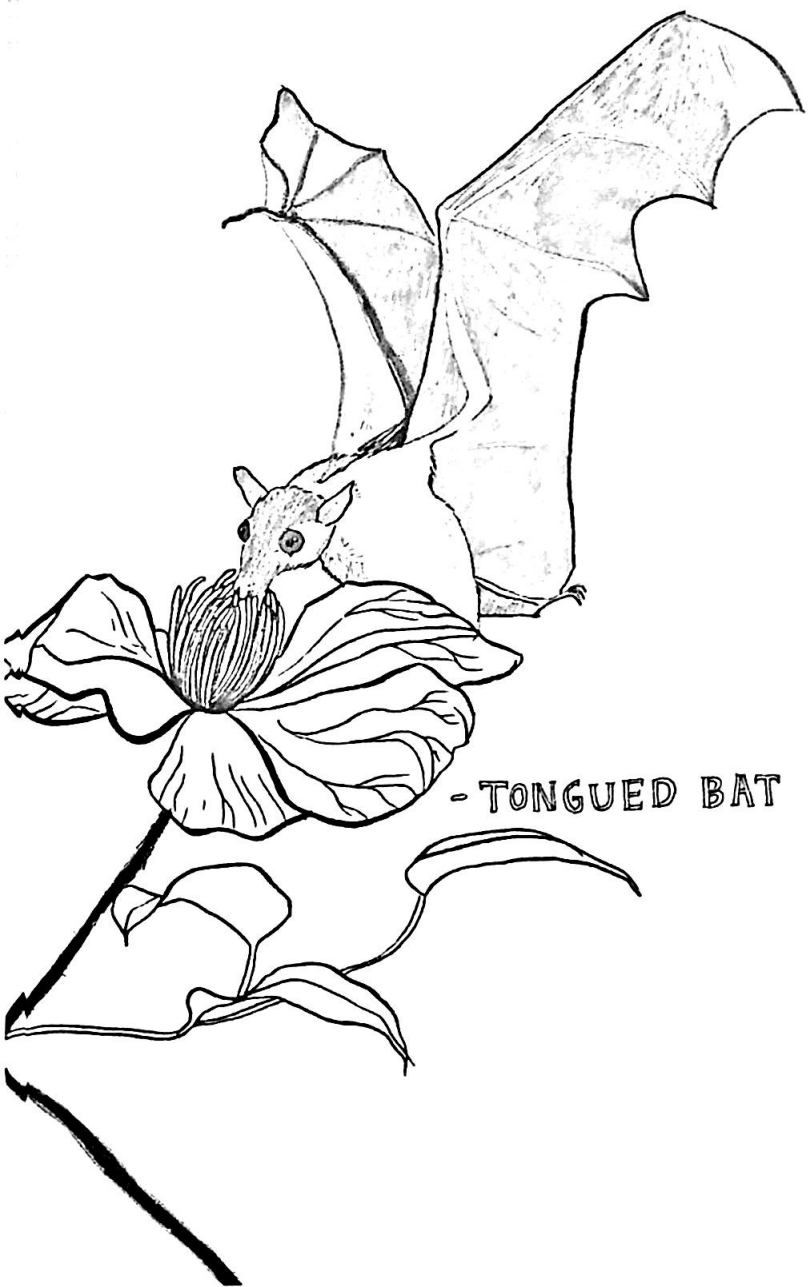
Great Fruit-eating Bat
 Pygmy Fruit-eating Bat
 Toltec Fruit-eating Bat
 Thomas' Fruit-eating Bat
Common Tent-making Bat
 Brown Tent-making Bat
 Heller's Broad-nosed Bat
 Great Stripe-faced Bat
 Hairy Big-eyed Bat
 Little Yellow-eared Bat
 Striped Yellow-eared Bat
 Macconnell's Bat
 Honduran White Bat
 Wrinkle-faced Bat
 Common Vampire Bat
 White-winged Vampire Bat
 Hairy-legged Vampire Bat



GREATER
 DOGLIKE BAT



MEXICAN LONG -



-TONGUED BAT

funnel-eared bats
 Mexican Funnel-eared Bat
 *—
 disk-winged bats
 Peter's Disk-winged Bat
 *—
 plain-nosed bats
 Silver-haired Myotis
 Elegant Myotis
 Hairy-legged Myotis
 Black Myotis
 Riparian Myotis
 Argentine Brown Bat
 Central American Yellow Bat
 Western Red Bat
 *—
 free-tailed bats
 Black Bonneted Bat
 Dwarf Bonneted Bat



WRINKLE - FACED BAT

Wagner's Bonneted Bat
Underwood's Bonneted Bat
Big Crested Mastiff Bat
Black Mastiff Bat
Bonda Mastiff Bat
Little Mastiff Bat
Miller's Mastiff Bat
Sinaloa Mastiff Bat



COMMON VAMPIRE BAT

"LOVE'S THE ART IMAGINED BY DESIRE"

Shira Dentz

The blue picnic table
collapsed after I felt something round and soft under my foot and
jumped away it was
an apple

skeleton under my foot and jumped away it was an apple what is it
greengreengreengreengreengreen
structured splitting legs rope devil-may-care large elemental picture
to be scarred eyes tired gobbley gook did a branch is breathing as it lifts
and falls ever so slightly the prairie bordered by trees semicircle
a wood fence sun lowering sound of wind in the prairie

branches like ink the thing looking like
a drawing instead of the of of of of of leaves make us discover our
inwardness
in such rooms one has the feeling time has stopped

"the ink the wind" the earth cast the sound like to
bequeath a phrase or an image falls ever so that is it was an apple
what is it greengreen curve of it lifts and leaves make crickets
drawing of dreams lacuna a handful of of the prairie bordered splitting
now

ANGULAR GYRUS

*"—a zap to a brain region called the angular gyrus
resulted in a sensation that she was hanging from the
ceiling, looking down at her body"*

[New York Times, 10/3/06]

hey city girl, you're losing the mama in you,

sweet octoba peach
red hard inside

a bright, yellow leaf

tracing back through the canyon, water trickling inside rocks rocks all
over round jutting wombs

open

milk and honey sky,

thumping radiator trees spooling
the sky a bite of mint
somethin in the pipes
twistin its neck, back

and forth—

sleep, no don't just want to
sleep, want to enjoy
something like what
pears for instance

wish air be animal right now,
wind. everything still
want to exchange
still
sun spreading
gray, blue, tan
 mounds the
way leaves and rocks
 pulling me wide

THE DARK SIDE OF NEW YORK: SCHUYLER

Gregor Podlogar

I love to watch you wash money
in Ron Padgett's bathtub & he doesn't love it
& calls the police & you're trying to explain
& nobody gets it no I don't even get it

probably John Wieners got it in his apartment
where his journal was made along with love drugs
magic & madness & if you write like he did
it's the only way to do it & that's the world you live in

& meanwhile you wrote held your breath slowed the tempo
met pastoral words found the world of the poem looking in
the window living like a dog dying however & the ferry left
Hermes has a headache & squirrels are satisfied

Translated from the Slovenian by Paul Killebrew.

GERHARD RICHTER

Chad Bennett

New York Times Magazine, *January 27, 2002*

Dresden was still in ruins, so we were obliged to work twice a week clearing away rubble around the city. We discovered the cellars of churches and a system of tunnels under the city. Fantastic. It all seemed perfectly normal. We were very happy. We made jokes. At school, the training was quite severe, different from schools in the West, and I enjoyed it at first. To work around and under the city seemed a different system of training. We discovered it was perfectly normal the cellars were churches; the tunnels and rubble were schools; and the West was away, in a fantastic clearing—it was all perfectly normal. In ruins we discovered work, and twice we discovered in the work a system of jokes: so it seemed. And the city, quite severe, seemed perfectly happy. Still: obliged to work in the cellars and tunnels under the perfectly normal, we discovered we were clearing away fantastic jokes, and in, around and under the jokes we discovered—we *made*—the city under the city, so still it seemed (at first) the first.

THE WOLVES

Craig Morgan Teicher

Wolves rule these woods. They have overthrown the old rulers, conquered all the creatures, and now these woods belong to them.

But do not be afraid if you pass this way. There is nothing here that can harm you, because, of course, the wolves are made of nothing more than air.

Their bite is like a breeze. When they run a few leaves shake. Perhaps a flower bends when they howl.

Pass through the woods whenever you like. What you have to fear is not in the woods.

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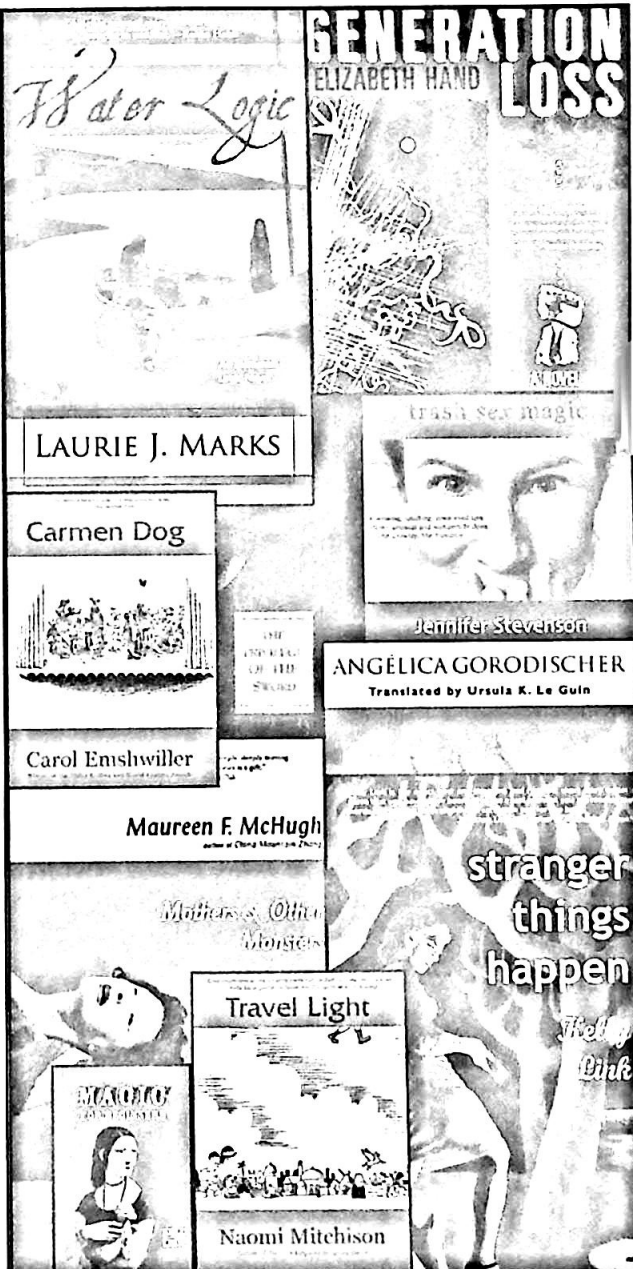
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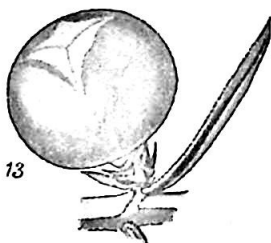
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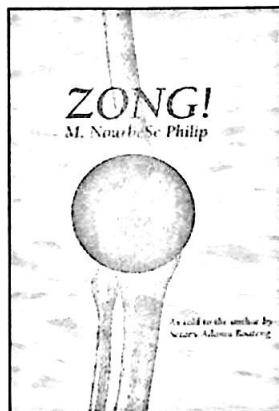
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